TROPIC LOVE

H. de VERE STACPOOLE

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TROPIC LOVE

BY

H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Blue Lagoon," etc.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE South Sea Islands make a universal appeal Most people have never set eyes on them, and have no prospect of doing so; yet they are confident and enthusiastic about the beauty and romance of those outlandish places. Writers galore have conspired to give a picture of them which is enchanting. In these authors' books, soft breezes blow eternally through graceful palm groves, sun-baked beaches are washed by the cool sea, and lagoons lie peacfully embraced within the lovely rampart of coral reefs. All this is true. There is no other earthly beauty to compare with the atolls of the Southern Pacific. Robert Louis Stevenson in describing the loveliness of a coral island seen in the first light of a calm morning has compared it to supernatural things, saying that the sight is "of a fairylike, a heavenly prettiness."

Some writers have also presented an ideal picture of life amidst those seductive surroundings. They give the impression that the lucky mortals who cruise or settle amongst the isles are favoured with unusually beautiful surroundings (including picturesque native people) and a splendidly benevolent climate, and that their existence consists of an unmitigated enjoyment of harmlessly theatrical

war-dances, executed by troupes of reformed savages to the accompaniment of weirdly thrilling musical instruments. This is part of the truth, but not the whole truth. There are many inhabitants of these isles "of a fairylike, a heavenly prettiness," who will tell their friends that the loveliness of the islands has strict limitations, that the climate of the tropical Pacific can be loathsome, and that the round of hot toil, sea-bathing and reviews of war-dances and what-not, can become indescribably boring and irritating. Mr. Somerset Maugham in a book of short stories, which was recently published in the READERS LIBRARY, entitled "Sadie Thompson," gives a realistic picture of some of the sordidness and unhappiness connected with life in the South Seas.

But the sweetness of life in those enchanting islands, is none the less persistent and also is typical of the Pacific archipelagos. There is happiness in the South Seas, and there is misery, just as anywhere else in the world. Some people find perfect contentment in being marooned there, away from the main stream of the world's activity; others hate the cramped existence. The book "Sadie Thompson" gives one picture. Mr. Stacpoole's stories collected in the present volume give another. Mr. Stacpoole has discovered, studied and praised what is idyllic in the life of the South Seas. His tales of the simple loves of Polynesian boys and maidens are filled with truth and art and beauty. They hint at what is ideal in primitive, unspoiled

emotion, pure affection growing as naturally as a wild tropical flower. But he shows how this ideal condition is complicated and disturbed by other emotions stirring the savage heart—the lust, for instance, for profits to be made from a pearl fished from the floor of a lagoon. Such evil desire may introduce hatred, jealousy and despair into human relationships. The realisation of happiness is not always easy, even amidst the most enchanting surroundings. The whims of physical Nature, too, are variable, not always kindly. The soft breeze which refreshes the idler, sweltering on a sun-broiled beach, may suddenly whip itself into a raging hurricane which demolishes villages, plantations, and sometimes the very islands themselves. Again, amid that fairylike, heavenly prettiness of the coral reefs, lurk fearful dangers. Mr. Stacpoole describes instances of the unperceived giant clam closing its heavy shell in a vicelike grip on the limbs of fishermen, necessitating the immediate amputation of those limbs, if the men are to be saved from drowning. References in Mr. Stacpoole's stories to such phenomena are a gentle reminder that all is not ideal in the South Seas; the idyllic existence is occasionally disturbed by overwhelming tragedy, indeed tragedy, in some of his stories, goes hand in hand with romance—but it is not the sordid tragedy of back streets that we find in some of the westernized islands, but the tragedy inseparable from the passions of men in wild and uncivilized surroundings.

H. de Vere Stacpoole is, of course, famous as the Author of one of the most widely read novels of modern times, "The Blue Lagoon." A short biographical note upon him appeared in the READERS LIBRARY edition of that charming romance. He is a writer who conveys with conspicuous success the atmosphere of the South Sea Islands which have formed the scene of many of his best stories. This volume, "Tropic Love," contains a series of tales which have never previously been published in a book. The longest story, "Coral Sands," was serialised in a newspaper, and the others have appeared in magazines. But now for the first time they are collected and presented in book form, for the enjoyment of countless readers, in one of the READERS LIBRARY'S inexpensive volumes.

THE EDITOR.

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CORAL SANDS

PART I

CHAPTER I

ARAFFURA LAGOON

FROM where Yakoff was standing in the blaze of the sun the beach ran away like a white road—miles and miles and miles away, to be lost in the blue and haze of distance. To the left of the beach lay the calm waters of the lagoon, to the right, the rough coral, beaten by the outer sea.

Nowhere in the world except in the low islands could you find a beach like that—just a ring of coral—sand and rock enclosing a lake so big that, in the great storms from the south-west, it could build six-foot waves.

If Yakoff had started to follow the road before him, leaving the houses of the native village at whose entrance he stood, he would have passed the long line of coconut trees immediately to the west, the extraordinary little gardens where vegetables were grown, the fowl-pens belonging to old Lipi the net-maker, and the deep-cut water tanks made to receive the rains. He would have passed canoe shelters and dozens of beached canoes, some old and broken and waiting to be destroyed or mended,

some new and ready to take the sea, for here was the navy yard of Araffura, and the docking place of the pearling fleet.

He would have passed the second coconut grove and then, leaving men and trees behind him, he would have gone on, with the sea to the right, with the lagoon to the left, through a world where there was nothing but sun-blaze and blueness, the fume and thunder of the breakers, and the crying of the gulls. He would have gone on and on through the same changeless, singing, blinding vacancy, the gulls crying to him to get away, and the waves calling to him, "There is nothing here," and noon would have turned to afternoon and afternoon to night, and under Canopus and the Cross he would have gone on and on to the break of day, and his journey far from finished. For, from the break, the reef of Araffura Lagoon is forty miles round.

But Yakoff was fat, and the most unlikely person in the world to start on a journey without an object. Fat and fifty years of age, and with a face that did not inspire confidence, even when half-hidden by the shadow of his sun-helmet.

Yet it was a face with a smile that rarely came off, even when the mind of Yakoff was moving in the direction of wrath, or revolving in the orbits of cunning.

A man to deal with cautiously in business, or better, not at all. Born at Archangel, educated by an uncle in a large way of trade, Yakoff Abrahamovitch, always known as Yakoff, went to the East as his uncle's correspondent in Shanghai. Here he did a deal for himself that damaged his uncle, and the result was separation. He prospered for a while in Shanghai, and then, somehow, he had to leave

This was the beginning of a long career which carried him in zigzags from Borneo to New York, and New York to Samarkand, and during which he had met and dealt with many men, and picked up an American accent.

During the last few years he had taken to the Pacific and, amongst other things, had made a speciality of pearls.

He was one of the buyers who come from all quarters of the world when the Paumotan pearling season begins, and his methods might be gauged from his nick-name, "The Tiger-Shark."

The Paumotus belong to the French, and French law gives the right of pearling to the natives and to no one else. You must have been born at Araffura if you want to fish there and take the pearls—you may be a pure kanaka if there is such a thing left to-day—or a half-caste or quarter-caste or a pure white, it doesn't matter, right of birth alone gives you the right to take shell and pearls.

But French law does not stop white men like Yakoff, or Chinks like Ah Sin, from coming to the pearling ground, and robbing the fishers—that is to say, trading with them.

Yakoff, who had landed a month ago, before the opening of the season, had brought ashore boxes and boxes of "trade"—that is to say goods, to swop for pearls or shell—and such trade! it would have made an old Pacific trader's eyes open could he have seen the contents of Yakoff's boxes. Cigarettes—and the very best cigarettes at that—striped silk pyjamas, socks and what not, white flannels, tennis shoes, shirts, photographic apparatus, silver-plated safety-razors, eau-de-Cologne. And the contents of the old Pacific schooner's trade-room in the old days,

what were they? Tin looking-glasses, bolts of gaudily-printed cotton, dud Barlow knives and clay tobacco pipes, not to mention twist.

All the same, in a compartment of one of Yakoff's boxes there were some articles akin to these—mouth organs, a five-dollar gramophone, chewing gum, and so forth—for Yakoff had learned from experience that the native mind refuses sometimes the most expensive lure and jumps to the cheapest—though it is never the cheapest for the native.

In this way, for a concertina with asthma, but silvered and varnished to shine with the best, he had got a four-hundred-pound golden pearl from Tipu, the son of Lipi. Tipu had refused a twenty-dollar Kodak, also a suit of flannels with a dollar watch thrown in, but the concertina got him.

Yakoff, standing now by the last of the native houses that lined the beach, saw Tipu going towards a beached canoe that lay near by. He pushed off and then, coming along also to take to his canoe, Yakoff saw Fernand Diaz.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE PERSON

THIS was the strangest person in that home of strange people, Araffura Lagoon.

Stark naked but for a loin-cloth, straight as an arrow, beautiful as a god and graceful as the Indian Bacchus, Fernand Diaz showed not a trace of the kanaka. The ruin of the kanaka face is the spread nose. Fernand's nose was high-bridged, thin-nostrilled, sensitive. He looked at you straight, and

right to the back of your skull, and his eyes, when roving the lagoon, had in them a look of distance and daring born of the great sea spaces and battles with the Paumotan winds.

He was naked now for the fishing, but in his house away back there you would have found the clothes he had just put off.

Yakoff was his tailor and outfitter, and never did a tailor get such money as Yakoff, for Fernand paid with pearls and shell. "Six silk shirts, a hundred and twenty dollars; two white drill suits, two hundred dollars; one hundred dollars for them silk socks, thrown in at the price. Them two white pearls will make me dollars out of pocket. Throw in that barroque to make things even." And the Araffura dandy would throw in the barroque. He never haggled with Yakoff. There were other things—eau-de-Cologne, white shoes, cigarettes—he paid for all and never went in debt, whereas his diving partner, Topi, was always up to the eyes, for Topi drank in the off season and Topi took opium when he could get it, and was always after the girls; a Polynesian with a Melanassian taint, wild as a kitiwake, yet at work honest and the best partner man could have.

Fernand never looked at a girl.

His Spanish ancestry — his father had been wrecked here twenty-two years ago—was strong in him, and maybe it was the pride of race that held him from loving and mating with the squash-nosed girls with luminous eyes who would have followed him to a warmer place even than Araffura, had he held up a finger. Maybe it was just coldness born of the sea and winds; but he never looked at a girl.

It wasn't religion. Seguer, the French missionary,

who had taught him French and English so that he could talk either language fluently, could not teach him religion, could not make a Catholic of him.

"I can understand here," said Fernand, putting his hand to his brow, "but not here," putting his hand to his heart. "I have been too deep in the sea, driven too often by the winds, seen too many stars. Death has held me too often in the hollow of his hand. I cannot think as you think, or feel as you feel."

Yet he had helped to build the tiny coral church, and had given a twenty-grain pearl to the mission of St. Francis, and he loved Seguer, and had once saved him from drowning at the risk of his own life.

"The best Christian in the Islands, though an absolute pagan," had said Seguer.

Fernand stopped now to speak to Yakoff.

"Yakoff," said Fernand, speaking in English, "you have sold my partner, Topi, opium again and at the beginning of the season."

"I," said Yakoff, "never."

"Nom de nom, you have sold him the opium. I found the parcel, he confessed to me, and I flung it to the lagoon. There I will fling you also should you sell him it again."

"You will have your jest," said Yakoff foolishly, unable to stand the gaze of the other.

"Yakoff, a man who carries opium to the Islands carries death, he is a brother of the tiger-shark and should die. It is the same with the man who brings Sam-shu, like the Chinaman, Ah Sin. You are a bad man, Yakoff, and no more goods will I take from you. No, never. Topi is in your debt. How much does he owe you?"

"But a few dollars, and that for goods supplied."

"He owes you a thousand dollars less fifty, and five hundred of those for the opium which I have flung away."

Now Yakoff was in with the French Commissioner of the Island, he felt safe from personal violence, he knew men, and he knew that he had lost Fernand as a customer, and his greasy soul hated the clean bright spirit it was facing.

The face under the sun-hat changed and he broke out, his voice suddenly taking the hard American tang:

"Haw! Stand away from me—don't crowd *me*. You and your partner, and be hanged to you both. Go on, take yourself off to your canoe, you damned kanaka."

Before this deadly insult Fernand drew slightly back. He would have killed Yakoff had he let himself loose. He just stood and looked, and Yakoff, before that gaze, lost his tongue and his assurance, shuffled his feet and went off.

CHAPTER III

KANAKA! KANAKA!

THE boy turned to the lagoon side where his partner Topi was waiting by their beached canoe. It was an outrigger. Far too narrow to sit the water, it was stabilized by a long skate-shaped piece of wood connected to the body of the canoe by a bridge of rattan. This bridge served also as a deck on which to stand; a mast and mat sail completed the outfit; and, when they had pushed off, Topi ran up the sail, and the east wind blowing from the lagoon mouth took them like a feather.

The push-off, the out-flying sail and the drive towards the west were beautiful to watch. It was like a water-bird taking to the water, or a dragon-fly to the air. Heading now for the pearling-grounds, steering-paddle in hand, Fernand kept the canoe on her course, mechanically, without thought, all his mind centred on one red spot—the insult of Yakoff.

"You damned kanaka."

It was the grain of truth that hit. His mother had been half kanaka. He, Fernand, was all white in soul, only for just that spot like an ulcer on his pride of race, and Yakoff had hit it.

And he couldn't kill Yakoff.

Deep in his heart the crave to kill Yakoff was like the desire of the drunkard for drink; but he could not kill him. He was too mean, too contemptible, and the insult would remain unkilled—yet some day, some way, he would satisfy his hatred of the trader. Yes, some day.

He flung the steering-paddle down. Topi was brailing up the sail; they had reached the pearling ground, and the pearling fleet lay all around and beyond.

All across the blue wind-dusked water it lay, canoe on canoe, anchored, with the brown divers dripping in the sun or dropping like stones to the depths.

Topi let the anchor fall, glanced over, and then, taking the net bag, fastened it round him. Then he slipped into the water like a seal and sank.

Fernand, looking over, watched his diving mate wandering about like a brown shadow amidst the long coach-whip oyster fucus, picking the oysters here and there and filling the bag, unhurried as a man ashore picking mushrooms.

Coloured fish cut across the vision and a great globed jelly fish went rolling by a fathom deep, like a crystal ball, followed by a young whip ray no bigger than a saucer, and a shoal of tiny silver fry. Then Topi rose and, with hand on gunnel, gave over the bag to be emptied. He had been down over two minutes.

Now the law of Araffura Lagoon—as indeed of all the Paumotan lagoons—is that no oysters may be rotted out on the beaches; all shells must be opened in the canoes and the meat, having been searched for pearls, flung overboard.

Fernand did the opening and searching to-day, stacking the empty shells, big as soup plates, in the bottom of the canoe. Not a pearl, nothing but a few seeds. He worked with an appearance of absolute indifference. He was used to the business—this business that seems to the uninitiated so romantic, so filled with the excitement of the treasure hunt, yet which in reality, and with the novelty gone, is monotonous as bottle washing.

For you may open a thousand oysters without finding a pearl, and a thousand more may only give you a bouton, yet in the very first oyster of the day's catch you may feel something round and hard in the flesh of the mantel and, gently working, may squeeze to light a beautiful milky bubble, a perfect round worth maybe a thousand dollars or maybe five.

There was nothing to-day; only the shell worth a few dollars and carefully cleaned and stacked.

But there were cigarettes to be smoked as they were drying off in the almost setting sun, whilst the canoe strained gently to its rope against the swell of the incoming tide.

CHAPTER IV

A GHOST FROM THE SEA

TOPI, who was forward and about to haul in th anchor, suddenly paused in that business and calle out to Fernand, who turned, shaded his eyes, an looked away towards the reef break.

Between the piers of coral the sheeting azure o the outer sea was rumpling towards the lagoon wate and lifting against the coral piers in foam.

The tide was coming in strong now, preceded b a bore like a ruler running under silk, and with th tide was coming a ship.

A topsail schooner, wind and tide with her, whit hull, white sails, hard against the blue as thoug cut from Pentelic marble.

A ship, but unlike any other ship they had eve seen. This was no frowsy trader, no mail brigantine no cockroach-trap laden with pearl buyers fron Papeete, this white ghost from the sea.

Fernand, gazing, fell into a rapture of mind; a his sea instincts stood abashed and worshipping befor this vision of whiteness and grace undreamed of an suddenly revealed. It was as though he were gazin at a spirit, a spirit that was nothing more than th two-hundred-ton auxiliary schooner yacht *Californi* the property of Cyrus Hardanger of San Francisco

They watched the sails shrivel off her and the whit hull turning broadside towards them as she swun towards the northern beach. They heard the rumbl of the anchor chain. Then, Topi, hauling in th kilik, they broke out the sail and steered to inspec the stranger.

PART II

CHAPTER V

JUNE

THIS boat, the *California*, whose anchor had just fallen in fourteen fathoms by the north beach of Araffura, was the last word in sea-going yachts. Built by Simons of Benicia and engined by Dowsett, she could stand a hurricane and make fun of a dead calm. She had a thousand miles of petrol in her, and had only used two hundred since leaving the Golden Gate, for Cyrus Hardanger, who had made ten million dollars five years ago, and at a stroke, as you may say, in one vast deal, was a sailer at heart and by origin.

He had worked before the mast as a young man he had got a mate's certificate, and then a master's, all of which implied brains, and he had educated himself by book-reading. One thing only had pulled him back at times, the tendency to be violent if he took drink. But he had overcome that.

He had been captain of a Seattle boat when the great phosphate deal, which made his fortune, came along, and he had celebrated his acquisition of wealth by marrying a widow, Mrs. Mallory, of Oakland, an amazingly good-looking woman with an amazingly pretty daughter of fourteen years. June was the

name of this child "taken over" by Hardanger with his wife, and the name suited her.

She was the apple of his eye and, when Mrs. Hardanger died two years after marriage, it was June who saved him from flying to drink or taking a dive into 'Frisco harbour.

Hardanger, six foot two, and with a fighting jaw looked a strong man. June, slight, graceful, and without a trace of the masculine in her composition was stronger. This girl, with grey eyes and phosphor-bronze hair, descended from the Mallorys who, in the old days of the covered wagon, had literally fought their way across the plains and the Rockies, had in her something of the spirit of the Pioneers, something of the daring and dash of the eagle.

When Hardanger, wanting a holiday in a hurry had bought the *California* off the slips at Simons and literally shoved her to sea with the fitters and riggers clinging to her till the last moment, June had been hand and fist with the dockyard mateys. This feminine creature had little use for women, she loved men. Not the sons of Mary who live in Pacific Avenue and wear gardenias and dress like mannequins, but the sons of Martha of whom it has been written:

> "It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and cushion the shock,
> It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care that the switches lock.
> It is their care that the wheels run truly; it is their care to embark and entrain,
> Tally, transport, and deliver duly the sons of Mary by land and main."

The sons who "do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose, and

do not teach that His Pity allows them to leave their job when they damn-well choose."

She loved men and they loved her at once. Railway men, boatmen, the ferrymen of 'Frisco Harbour—where she owned and ran a little power boat of her own—they all knew Cy Hardanger's daughter. She was a character in her way, but without a trace of pose.

On board the *California* she found herself for the first time under the magic of sticks and sails. She was one of the crew and discovered in herself the properties of a faultless steersman. The steersman is born, not made. To hold the *California* on her course without a tremble of the canvas was a business without any effort on her part.

It had been her privilege to bring the schooner in through the break, handing over the wheel to Sellers, the bo'sun, only when the auxiliary was taking charge.

She came forward now to the bow where the fellows were getting ready to lower the anchor, and stood looking, for the first time in her life, at the wonders of an atoll island.

The wind that had brought them through the break had fallen to a gentle breathing that made cats'-paws on the mirror of the lagoon; across the still water in the sunset light lay the pearling fleet, some still anchored, some beating up against the dying wind to inspect the newcomer: the reef ran away into the golden west and the voice of the outer sea beating on it came loud from the near stretches, low from the far, whilst great flights of birds that had pursued the pearling fleet all day showed like a strew of rosy and golden spangles blown on the evening wind.

Now and again their voices came challenging and answered by the voices of the reef birds. Nothing

more. Nothing but the sense of vast sea spaces and a silence scarcely broken by the murmur of the reef.

Now as the anchor fell and the *California*, swinging to her moorings, turned her nose to the reef against the tide, the girl left the bow and came aft to where the landing stage would be lowered.

Several canoes had put off from the shore and were paddling about, holding off and on, the fellows in them holding up drinking nuts for sale and ornaments made of shell, whip-ray walking sticks, coral lumps and conches, all the dust-traps, in fact, that the low islands vie with the high islands in producing. But they couldn't trade till Porges, the French Superintendent of the fisheries, had come on board to give a clean bill of health.

June, standing by her father, looked over the side watching the canoe men. Then, when the stage was lowered and Porges had come aboard and gone down to the cabin, she continued watching, wondering at this new life which she had never seen before.

In one of the canoes that had put off from the beach she saw a stout white man. It was Yakoff, who had been rowed off to inspect the newcomer.

Yakoff looked at the girl and took in the yacht. He saw at once that there was no business for him to do here, nothing to buy, nothing to sell, as yet. He gave orders to the paddle men of his canoe to take him right round the *California* and then back to shore. In his tour of inspection he noted everything, the large ports, some with silk curtains drawn against the last rays of the sun; the steam pinnace swung at the davits, the crew still busy on deck and aloft, and a large French cook in white, and wearing a white paper cap, who had come up for a moment's breath of air.

Dollars, dollars, dollars, millions of dollars, that is what the yacht said to Yakoff as he rowed round it, and the soul of Yakoff revolted.

All his life he had been after the dollars, all his life he had dreamed of wealth like this, and he had never succeeded. He had made out, that was all.

Here he was, fifty years of age and more in this rotten place, selling shirts and concertinas to kanakas, making a bit it is true, but less than many a small tradesman makes in 'Frisco or New Orleans; and here was this man rolling in the stuff. Inherited, most likely, won without a turn of the wrist.

Yakoff as he stepped on to the beach felt bitter, he could have wrecked the *California* and drowned the unknown man who owned her. Fortunately, he had not the powers of Prospero, but he had a thirst which took him off away down the beach to Carlon's shack, where the last case of beer from Papeete could be had at a dollar a bottle.

Meanwhile, the girl, leaning on the rail above the boat stage, looked at the canoes as they came and went.

Some of the pearling fleet had turned towards the *California* and she saw Taori, the son of Lipi, and his partner Tapu, the laziest pair of scamps in Araffura, who had been only too glad to break away from the pearling ground on any pretence.

They had spent the day mostly smoking cigarettes, playing knuckle-bones, diving only when the spirit moved them; but, like most idlers, they were pleasant people, and Taori, having sighted June, waved his paddle as to an old acquaintance and smiled. June did ditto, waving her hand, and the canoe passed on.

Taori and Tapu might be idlers, but they were

gentle folk and they would not hang about staring at the girl.

Then came along another canoe.

It was Fernand's.

The sail was brailed up and Topi was paddling whilst Fernand stood, one foot on the bridge, one hand on the mast, his eyes fixed on the *California*.

Then as he came close, his eyes rested on the girl.

June drew slightly back. The fact that he was not a native, that he was nearly naked, and the sudden statuesque picture of him there in the last rays of the sun, came together to her as a surprise. But June was not the person to be long surprised or to refrain from questions, even had the great god Pan risen from the sea to greet the *California*.

She watched the canoe come closer and then she went right down the steps and stood on the grating of the landing stage.

The canoe came boldly alongside, Fernand raising his hand to the girl in salutation. Then with a touch of the paddle on the gratings of the stage he kept it in position.

"That is an outrigger," said June.

She had seen an outrigger in a drawing, but never in reality till she saw the pearling fleet, for the *California* in coming down had touched at no islands, her course being from San Francisco to Lima, and from Lima west by south to Araffura.

"Yes," said Fernand, answering in English. "She is an outrigger. She belongs to me and my partner here; we are pearlers." He touched with his naked foot the heap of shell, and June, standing on the landing grating, her eyes on the heaving canoe, the all-but-nude Fernand, the heap of shell and the dripping paddle, was caught away for the fraction of a moment

nto a world absolutely beyond the world of civiliza-ion—at least, of ours. She might have been on the ea steps of the Piraeus in the days of the triremes, wo thousand years away from the world that holds lew York, Chicago and San Francisco.

But this eminently practical person, ungiven to ream-states, was not long in returning to reality.

"Yours is not the same as those little canoes from he beach," said she. "Yours is bigger and has a nast; is that because she is a pearler?"

"Yes," said Fernand.

"And the one that has just passed and waved to ne, that also is a pearler?"

"Yes," said Fernand. "She belongs to Lipi, the ne who waved his paddle to you."

"I like yours the best," said June. "It is better ound, better altogether."

She did not speak in the spirit of compliment, her nowledgeable eye had taken in the differences be-ween the two craft, between the slack and slovenly nd the clean and taut and trim.

Fernand smiled. He understood. Topi, crouching ear the mast, smiled too, he did not understand, ut he sensed the friendliness of the strange woman vho was talking to his pearling mate.

The three of them were at ease at once, and to June, after the first moment, there was no nearly-naked young Greek god, no crouching savage by the hell in the canoe, but two sea workers, capable and urely full of lore of which she knew nothing, and there vas the canoe, a dream and a wonder to look upon.

The canoe appealed to her more than its occupants. She had fallen in love with it at first sight. She determined to know it better, to sail it and feel its response under the steering paddle.

"To-morrow," said she, "I would like to see how your canoe sails, and I would like to see the pearling beds in her. Will you take me?"

"Oh yes," said Fernand. "I will have her cleaned to-night and to-morrow—at what time?"

"In the morning—any time," said she, and as she spoke a violet fan of shadow swept across the lagoon. The sun had set.

"When you are ready will be our time," said Fernand, and as he spoke the rising dusk took the reef and the sea.

"Good night."

"Good night," replied Fernand. The canoe was away. She heard the splash of paddles and saw the receding craft vanishing as the sail rose to the wind that had freshened with the coming of night.

Fernand, steering for the shore, beached the canoe helped by Topi.

It was just before the rising of the moon, and the sky, one living mass of stars, showed the palm trees at the break, and farther in the masts of the yacht whose anchor light had been raised. Through the warm sea-perfumed night the outer beach spoke miles and miles of it answering to the eternal thunder of the breakers, and on the reef against the sea line lights showed—the torches of the fish spearers searching the pools.

Topi went off, but Fernand hung by the canoe. The moon would be up in a minute and give him all the light he wanted for the cleaning of it.

In the ordinary way he would have made Topi stop to help, but somehow in this particular matter he preferred to work single-handed.

He lit a cigarette.

I have said that in all his life Fernand had never

ooked at a girl. Well, he had looked at one that vening and, as he stood now smoking and waiting or the moon to rise, he was looking at her again.

CHAPTER VI

TOPI

He had never before come across a white woman ure and simple. There was Autonna, the wife of 'ari, three parts white, and Le Paru the half Portu- uese; all sorts of others, some half Chink, some early English, but never before had he come across he white woman of high civilization.

The effect of the vision on Fernand was curious n the extreme. He was attracted yet repelled.

The attraction came from June, lithe, young, good o look upon, dressed by Roberts, of 'Frisco. The epulsion came from the sore that Yakoff had hit hat afternoon.

"You damned kanaka."

The kanaka spot in Fernand was only a spot, only drop of blood that was not European—that did ot matter, it was the spoiling thing in his life. A rit is a small thing, but when it gets in a man's ye, it is no longer small.

The missionary had once unconsciously dropped a vord that had made Fernand see the gulf between he half-caste and the pure white. Channen, the each-comber, had let himself go freely one afternoon n the same subject, and to-day Yakoff the trader ad spoken the thing full out when, turning to 'ernand, he flung the fact in his face with an oath.

Then, as if to complete matters, the *California*

had come in, bringing this strange white girl, a crea
ture that appealed at once to his heart and his sense
seized him with all the power of the new and strang
yet repelled him through his pride and imaginatio

"She is white," said his pride; "and you, yes, yo
are white, white as she is—only for that stain tha
does not show at all, yet which is there, and whic
she would sneer at did she know."

He wished now he had not promised to bring th
canoe to the yacht in the morning. She wanted t
see it and sail in it and feel how it went under th
steering paddle. Just so; but was he a common cano
man that she should make such a suggestion to him
Why had he not said to her, "If you wish to sail on
of our canoes, I will tell Lipi to bring his for you i
the morning?" Why not do that, anyhow? Ye
to-morrow morning instead of going himself he woul
send Lipi. Lipi's canoe was old and dirty—no matte
Why should he bother?

Now, as he stood there smoking and thinking thing
like this, the moon began to rise above the easter
reef line. She broke clear of the sea and reef, givin
every palm tree a shadow on the white sand an
showing the schooner clearly as she lay, the lights o
her ports and deck-house casting amber dribbles o
the moon-silvered lagoon waters.

Fernand flung his cigarette end away and, turnin
began to clean the canoe—as a rule the shell of th
day's catch would be left in her till next mornin
but he began to-night by taking it out and stackin
it on the beach. He would send Topi to fetch
when he had finished with the canoe.

Why was he cleaning her? If he had determine
not to go on the morrow, but to send Lipi instea
why was he preparing the canoe?

The job finished, he came along towards the village to find Topi and send him back for the shell.

Fernand's house was near the entrance to the village; anything with a roof to it is a house at Araffura, and "shack" would have been a better name for the dwelling place of Fernand; all the same it had two rooms and a kitchen at the back; a native woman kept it clean and did the cooking. She had even left to-night a lamp half on in the front room, the light showing through the slats of the shutters.

He did not go in, but went to find Topi. Topi lived in the last house, a palmetto-thatched hovel that he shared with three others, and when Fernand reached it, Jalu, one of Topi's house mates, was sitting outside with knees up, smoking a pipe and contemplating the moon.

When Jalu saw Fernand he made a hurried effort to rise and scatter. Fernand saw at once that something was wrong, and came close to the other.

"Jalu, where is Topi?"

"Topi has gone to the fishing on the reef," said Jalu.

"Then what is that noise I hear?"

"What noise?"

"That—listen!"

"I hear nothing but the speaking of the reef," said Jalu.

Fernand came to the shack door and opened it, and there lay Topi, his arms extended and snoring.

It was always like that when he got hold of the cursed opium, and now he would be no use next day.

"He must have come back," said Jalu, quite unabashed. "He is weary."

"Jalu," said Fernand, "who gave him the dope?"

"Which?" asked Jalu.

"Don't fool with me. Who gave him the opium?"

"He had no money," said Jalu.

"I am not asking you that. Who gave him the opium?"

"Well," said Jalu, hesitating like a little child, "it was Yakoff the trader."

"Oh, he gave him the opium and got no payment for it."

"No," said Jalu, "he was paid nothing. It was to spite you for stopping his selling opium and to spoil your fishing on the morrow. Yakoff is like the monkey they brought on the trading schooner from Papeete. He is full of mischief and never forgets an enemy."

"I will break his neck if I hear much more of him," said Fernand, hot wrath surging up in him against the scoundrel who thought nothing of damning men's bodies and souls for the sake of a few dollars, and who had insulted him in so deadly a fashion that morning.

"I will break his neck and then the devil will take him where he is overdue. Well, there lies Topi, and I had wanted him to-morrow as I have a special business to perform."

"He will not be right to-morrow," said Jalu, a fact that required no demonstration.

Fernand returned to his house.

He had decided even while cleaning the canoe that he would keep his promise to the white girl in the morning. If there had been anything wanting to keep the decision firm, the action of Yakoff would have supplied it.

Yakoff knew nothing of the girl. He only wanted to serve Fernand a nasty turn, and he had done so. Put up an obstacle in his path, and an obstacle to

Fernand was the one thing needed to stimulate him to action.

Topi being out of count, he would take the canoe to her single-handed. He returned to his house and, not bothering to fetch the shell he had left on the beach, went in and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

CYRUS

MEANWHILE, on board the *California* dinner had been served.

Nothing could be more striking than the difference between the desolation and half savagery of the Island beach and the saloon of the yacht, the table sparkling with crystal and silver, the darkie steward, all in white, assisted by the second steward, a Javanese, turbaned and sandalled, the girl in evening clothes, and the man, the owner of this floating mansion, also in evening dress.

It might have been Delmonico's before the Pussyfoot era, or Sherry's, and yet through the open ports and half-open skylight came, like the sound of a distant train, the roar of the reef to the breakers, a ceaseless sound that had filled the air before the Conqueror had landed on English soil, before Moses had given laws to the Israelites, before Rameses ruled in Egypt.

"Such a lovely boatman," said June. "He's like a picture, and he's promised to bring his canoe tomorrow morning for me to try."

"Well, mind the sharks," said her father. "Those outriggers will spill you like quicksilver if you're not careful with them. I remember——"

He checked himself.

"Yes?" said June.

"Oh, it was nothing—only a business on the coast and it was a catamaran that capsized."

"What was the business?" asked she.

Cyrus had an irritating habit of beginning a story, intriguing the imagination and then drying up. He would start a yarn about his past experiences and then suddenly the story would wilt. It was as though there were something in his past life that had a chilling effect when remembered.

June knew next to nothing about her step-father's past. He had been a sailor; he had made his money in phosphates; he had been good to her mother; he was himself the great burly four-square Cyrus Hardanger; that was all she knew and all she wanted to know. Yet her instinct for a story prompted her now to try and make him talk.

"What was the business?" she asked.

Cyrus laughed. Perhaps it was the wildness of the place outside and the sense of the distance of civilization that loosened his tongue, perhaps the champagne.

"What was the business? Smuggling. Yes, you'd never think your old step-dad had been a smuggler. It was guns."

"What sort of guns?" asked June, vastly interested and quite unshocked.

"Rifles. Remington rifles. Automatics and the ammunition for them."

"And where were you smuggling them to?" asked June.

"It was this way," said he. "A little tin-pot South American State was due to have a revolution, they hadn't had one for five years, so my partner went

sing down looking for the head of the revolution-
ies, and found him, and contracted to land guns
ith ammunition for fifty thousand American dollars
ld coin. We did. But prospecting in the business
had a spill from that boat I've called a catamaran.
was three logs with a mast to it."

"What became of your partner?" asked June.

Cyrus, who had been toying with his wine-glass,
zing at the table-cloth with a far-away look as he
lked, turned his eyes on June.

The question seemed to have startled him out of
mself and thrown him off his balance.

"What became of who?—Oh, him?—I don't know.
e went to Australia and had a quarrel and parted."

He pushed the glass away and took the box of
gars that had been placed by his side, selected one
d lit it.

Then he went up on deck to smoke.

June noticed that he had not taken the band off
e cigar, an invariable act never omitted to her
owledge till now.

The girl felt disturbed. She was absolutely with-
t care for convention, still it came to her with an
ter-shock, this fact that Cyrus had been running
ce outside the law. She had not minded whilst
was telling the story, but now he was gone the
ter-taste came.

Smuggling guns to revolutionaries—and his partner.

hy had the question disturbed him so?

June loved Cyrus. He was everything and every-
ing to her—mother, father, brother and sister all
lled into one. She loved him like that, and she
ved him also as a protector. Anything threatening
m, anything derogatory to him, touched her soul.

She wished now that she had not asked that ques-

tion. A man must have many things in his life, n
all of them admirable—Why had she asked; why ha
he told her? It was nothing, yet somehow it seeme
a stain.

She came up on deck.

June had a highly-strung temperament; she wa
hypersensitive to the personality of others, and sh
was instinctive. On deck she could not see her fathe
he was in the deck-house—which was used as
smoking room—smoking. Having ascertained thi
by looking through the deck-house port hole, she wen
to the starboard rail and leaned on it, looking at th
shore.

The *California*, swinging to the tide, was broadsid
on to the reef, and she could see the lights of th
little houses, and far away to the west the torch
of the fish spearers on the outer coral.

The moon which had risen showed the beache
canoes on the inner beach and the flare where Lip
the net maker and canoe mender, was at work meltin
pitch.

From the village came the tangling of a banjo an
a harsh raucous voice singing an American negro son

It was just in this moment, as though winged b
the banjo notes, that a sense of impending dange
came to June. Not danger to herself but to Cyru

Suddenly and all at once Araffura lagoon becam
for her malignant; there was something here crouchin
in the darkness and ready to spring, something tha
frightened her. The sound of the reef seemed its voic
and those twinkling lights its eyes—absurd. She trie
to fight against it and, turning, came to the deck-hous
door. She came into the house and closed the doo

Cyrus, in an arm-chair, was reading a book. Th
steward had just put coffee by his side.

"No, thanks," said June. "I don't feel I want offee to-night. Dad, I don't like this place."

"Why, what on earth is wrong with the place?" sked Cyrus. "You mean the island, of course."

"Yes, I don't like it. Will you come right away rom it to-morrow?"

Cyrus laughed.

"I've got to wait here till the mail brigantine is n from Papeete, and there's a cable coming by her, nd letters and stores. MacAlister fixed it all up in Frisco for me. Then the auxiliary has to be taken own and cleaned and tinkered, and one of the spars s sprung. No, Ju, I can't take her out to-morrow. Nor next day, nor for a full week. Now what ails ou, little girl? Come, spit it out."

"Oh, it's nothing," said June. "Only—only—as was standing on deck just now a feeling came to ne that danger was here, and coming to us—to you."

"Lord bless your soul," said Cyrus, "danger has een coming to me all my life, and what's more, it as arrived time and again, and I've met it. I eckon danger is everywhere, and if it don't hit you ith a tornado, it's just as likely to hit you with a late on your head coming down Market Street. Danger don't trouble me; don't let it trouble you."

"I couldn't help speaking," said June. "Maybe 's all foolishness. I hope so, anyway."

She went off after having kissed him good night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JOY OF MORNING

When she awoke in the morning the brooding sense f danger was gone, or at least had withdrawn.

It was seven o'clock and she came on deck nearly an hour before breakfast to find a fresh wind blowing and seagulls clanging and fishing, the coconut palms bending to the merry wind and the foam of the outer reef flashing high. The world seemed new made new minted, youth everywhere hand in hand with morning. The wind brought the smell of the beach. Some storm beyond the Marquesas was sending a heavy run of sea, strewing the outer beach with still living seaweed, breaking the coral that would soon be renewed. The whole forty mile ring of Araffura Lagoon is living; at least it is protected from the sea by a living reef that grows again when broken.

June breathed in the scent of the reef. She was worth looking at as she stood all in white, her hand on the rails and her eyes on the shore where the early morning life of the village had begun.

Children were playing by the water-side, and on the strip of canoe beach the pearl fishers were gathering, pushing off or tinkering at their canoes. The sound of a concertina came on the breeze. It was the concertina Yakoff had sold to Tipu for a pearl worth several hundreds, and here and there, arising twisted by the wind, could be seen the smoke from the fires of the cooking places where the fish caught overnight were being cooked.

She had almost forgotten Fernand and his promise of bringing the canoe.

At half past nine, however, just as Cyrus was lighting his first cigar of the day, and the darkie steward was clearing the breakfast things, a quartermaster dropped below to say that a canoe had come off and could Miss June please come up and look at it.

"That's him," said June, forgetting her grammar, but remembering the canoe man of the night before.

'I'll be up in a minute. Dad, I'm going to try and sail an outrigger."

"Well, you can swim," said Cyrus, "and there's no fear of sharks after what they've been doing to them, so the bo'sun told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"Oh, it's just done to frighten the others. Beginning of the pearling season they catch half a dozen tiger sharks and cut off their fins and blind them and let them loose in the lagoon. They go cruising about and that frightens the other sharks so that they keep clear of the place."

"Oh, the cruel beasts," cried June. "How can human beings do such things?"

"Well, I expect if you'd seen a human being after a tiger shark had taken a piece off him, you wouldn't be asking that," said Cyrus, sitting down to his bureau and the letters which were due to be dispatched when the mail brigantine left for Papeete.

On deck, June got a surprise. Wobbling in the swell beside the landing-stage gratings lay the canoe, but the canoe man was not the nearly-naked Apollo of the night before. Fernand was not diving today, he had put on white flannels and a white shirt. He wore neither shoes nor stockings, all the same the change was startling for a moment, but only for a moment: after that the canoe took all her attention.

"My partner is not well," said Fernand, "so I brought her out alone."

"Thanks," said June.

In the full light of morning the canoe lay before her in all its strangeness. The body seemed cut from a single tree-trunk, so narrow was it, the outrigger was just a long slip of wood and the rattan bridge between canoe and outrigger was so open-

worked that she could see the water through it as she gazed down.

Fernand explained that nearly every other canoe was connected with the outrigger by two curved wooden rails and that the broad bridge of rattan was the work of a canoe maker who had brought the idea from somewhere else.

"It is good to stand on," said he, "and to tie things to." He pointed with his bare right foot to some green coconuts in a net bag tied to the bridge. "Drinking nuts," said Fernand, "if one is thirsty."

"It's wonderful," said June; "wonderful that it floats at all without upsetting. Have you brought a paddle for me?"

Fernand said that there were three paddles on board. He pointed them out lying aft all in a bunch, but would she not prefer putting off the business till Topi was well and able to accompany them to help in the paddling. He would be well to-morrow.

No. June wanted to go then and there, she guessed she could paddle as well as Topi, she was used to a Canadian canoe, and anyone who could paddle a Canadian canoe could paddle anything.

Fernand, with a grave smile, but without a word, brought the little craft close up to the gratings and held her there whilst the girl stepped in.

Woof! but this was different from a Canadian canoe or a Rob Roy. Why, this was crazy, plumb crazy!

She had forgotten the outrigger whose weight kept the thing from turning turtle when she leant to starboard, and whose resistance kept it from doing ditto when she leant to port. Then with a push they were out on the glittering water, a river of looking-glass between her and the *California*.

Fernand courteously handed her a paddle and showed her how to use it. "When we get a bit farther away," said he, "I will break out the sail. Would you care to see the pearling grounds?"

For a moment the one desire of June was to get back to the yacht and safety. She had been utterly fearless up to this; canoes, motor boats, yachts of all sizes, she was used to them, perhaps through heredity, but this thing was perfectly new, there was no ancestral experience to meet it. But she would far rather have drowned than confessed to this.

"Yes, certainly," she said. "I am longing to see the pearling grounds."

Fernand turned the canoe's head to the west. Then he broke out the sail. The run was short, he dropped the anchor and June, used to the business now and unafraid, looked round her at the pearling fleet. Far and wide it lay spread, the pearlers idling and smoking or busy as beavers in the water. The pearler takes his own time and will not be hurried, he may idle half a day, or a whole day, or he may nearly kill himself with work.

Fernand explained this to the girl.

"Do you dive?" she asked.

"I am a diver," he replied. "I was born here and there is nothing else to do; but I am not of these people."

"Oh, no," she said, "of course not. I could see that at once."

"My father was wrecked here many years ago, said Fernand. "His name was the same as mine, Fernand Diaz. He was from Seville. He married my mother, who was not pure white. Both my father and mother are dead. My mother was half French." He stopped.

June guessed what was at his heart. He did not say what the other half of his mother was. Native, of course, and he was ashamed of it. Though he showed nothing of this fact outwardly, she knew, just as though she were reading his thoughts.

"I would never have thought you anything but English or French," said she.

"Yet it remains," said Fernand. "It is a barrier between me and you people."

"Only a barrier for fools," said she indignantly, and infinitely touched by the way he had said, "you people," as though he were cut out, a lost sheep through no fault of his own. "Only a barrier for fools. Forget it, or at least don't let the remembrance of it worry you. Now tell me. How is it that you come to speak English so well, seeing that you were Spanish?"

"Oh, I talk French as well as English," said he. "It was our missionary who taught me, and I am one of those who pick up languages easily."

He was looking away towards the *California*.

A canoe was putting off from the shore for the yacht and, even at that great distance, Fernand recognized it as the canoe of Yakoff, or rather, the canoe that Yakoff always hired for the season.

Fernand's sight was keen as that of the sea hawks, besides, Yakoff, out of some whim, always fixed a dugong skull at the bow of his canoe as a mascot.

"What are you looking at?" asked the girl.

"Oh, it is only a canoe putting out to your boat," he replied. "Yakoff the trader. A bad man."

"How bad?"

"He sells the men opium. My partner is ill today because of the opium Yakoff sold him or gave him, and now he is going to your boat."

"I will tell father when I get back," said she.

"Yes," said Fernand, "it would be well."

The sight of Yakoff's boat putting out to the yacht had touched him in a strange manner, it was as though he sensed some danger to June and her father. Perhaps it was just his knowledge that the trader was an 18-carat bad man, joined with a suddenly awakened feeling for this girl who was the first person who had ever sympathized with him, be that as it may, the premonition remained.

June, leaning on the canoe gunnel, was looking overboard. She had forgotten Yakoff and everything else. A huge sea bream was passing beneath the boat, moving without swiftness, but without effort, he vanished and another appeared, passed and vanished. Then another, which suddenly bent on itself and flicked away, whilst a grey rushing shape that had aimed at the bream and missed, passed with a trail of bubbles.,

"It is a fish-shark," said Fernand. "Not dangerous—or only to the fish. See, there are oysters."

The girl, looking down through the water now clear and undisturbed, saw the huge shells half-tilted on their sides; amidst the long coach-whip oyster fucus, a little to the right and almost out of the line of vision, she saw another shell, pale, enormous, looking at least four feet in breadth.

"That," said Fernand, "is something worse than any shark. *Mayama* we call it. But the Americans call it a clam. See! it is open. Should a diver put his foot into it or a hand, it would close. He would never escape."

The girl shuddered. Under and through all this beauty Death showed himself lurking as in that picture of Albrecht Durer's. Last night the French-

man who came on board had warned the yacht not to fish, as the lagoon fish just at that season were poisonous. She mentioned this fact now and Fernand nodded.

"Yes," cried Fernand, "one can easily die a Araffura if one is not careful."

He stood up and unbrailed the sail, then he pulled in the anchor.

"But you have not yet seen the lagoon," said he.

She looked up at him, wondering what he meant The lagoon was all around them, yet she had no seen it? He guessed by her look what was in he mind.

"I will show you," said he.

He gave her the sheet to hold and took the steering paddle.

PART III

CHAPTER IX

A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE

THE sail tugged at the sheet and the canoe headed away from the beach.

Fernand steering, talked of the lagoon currents, of the variable winds and the squalls that sprang sometimes from a clear sky. He told of a big spiral current in the lagoon centre that twisted this way and that at the dictation of the tides, and he found he was talking to a person who understood, to a practical sailor whose experiences were even broader than his.

She told him about San Francisco Bay, that vast stretch of water of which San Pablo and Susun Bays are part, of the wonders of the Golden Gate, through which the white fogs came rolling in from the Pacific, and through which all shapes and forms of ships have come, from the ships of the early Spaniards to the iron grain-ships and tankers of to-day. He knew nothing of these things and San Francisco—well, he had never seen a city. He couldn't imagine a city. He had never seen any houses other than the shacks on the beach. He had seen pictures of houses, but he couldn't visualize streets full of roaring traffic, cable cars, crowds.

June, when this fact had been fully borne in on her, was astonished. It could not be otherwise, yet she had not realized it before. Fernand seemed to her a man adrift, cut off, stranger even than Robinson Crusoe, for in Crusoe's days there were no steam ships, no telegraphs, no railways, and this talk, as it were across a great abyss, drew them both closer together than a week of ordinary acquaintanceship would have done. Besides that, there was the fact of their youth and their equal love of the sea, powerful bonds, made even more powerful by the fact that each was a perfect specimen of humanity.

"Look!" said Fernand.

The sail, spilling the wind, flapped loose against the mast, and June, turning her head, gazed round her. She knew now what he meant when he had said that about her not having yet seen the lagoon.

To right and left, forward and astern, there was nothing but sea. Not a trace of land, not even a palm top. Yet they were still in the lagoon and around them still stretched the ring of the great reef, yet so far as to be invisible from their low elevation. With a glass they might have made out the top-masts of the *California* in the sea-shimmer of the far north-east, but to the naked eye these were invisible.

One thing alone showed firm in that waste of water, a white line to starboard down which gulls were flying.

"Sand-bank," said Fernand. "The tide is running out. It will be covered again at full tide; all around here the current is running that I told you of; it goes round and round; then when the tide turns, it goes round and round the other way about, see!"

He pointed to a log floating near them, half-submerged.

"That has been here maybe years, anything caught in the current cannot get away. If we were to lose our oars and our sail we would be like that log."

June glanced at the log, at the bits of floating seaweed, evidently prisoners like the log, and at the line of sand-bank, smiling and sinister; the lagoon was showing her another aspect of itself. Saying to her: "Well, how would you like to be here with me for ever, a prisoner. Mine?"

Suddenly, Fernand, half-rising, seized a paddle. Something had broken the water to port; something vicious and rushing like a torpedo just released.

"Blind shark," he cried. "Look out! No—it's gone." He held for a moment without breathing, paddle in hand, then turning the canoe, he shook out the sail.

"One of the tiger-sharks they blinded last week, it can't steer. No fin. Take the paddle and keep her to the wind. It's playing about right in the current and we had better get away from here."

June took the paddle. She had scarcely dipped the blade when crash! the canoe was stove as if hit by a bomb-shell and she was struggling in the water.

Fernand was holding her up, and she still grasped the paddle; he took it from her and, as they swam making for the line of the sand-bank, he struck the water with it. The blinded brute that had dashed into them and wrecked them had vanished—but he might return. As for the canoe, it was a hopeless wreck, half-submerged, and to cling to it would be useless.

June felt something hit her knee, it was a ridge

of the sand, another stroke brought them into two-foot water and Fernand, rising, helped her to her feet.

CHAPTER X

THE SAND-BANK

He cast the paddle down and they stood exhausted, without a word for a moment, their eyes fixed on the wreck of the canoe. They could see the brown sail flat on the water. The mast had been unstepped by the shock and the canoe body smashed just abaft the mast; the body was submerged, but the outrigger showed tilted up, and on the bridge they could still see the drinking-nuts secured in their net bag, and even as they looked they could see the work of the current.

The wreckage was being carried east, and it was going quicker than a man could walk.

Fernand broke the silence.

"It was my fault for bringing you out so far," said he. "Oh, yes, it was my fault—and now, see. Nom de nom—what have I brought you to?"

"It was no one's fault," said June; "or only the fault of the men who blinded that shark. There is no use at all in thinking about what has been. The question is what are we to do now."

Fernand sighed deeply. It is the situation without precedent that tries the nerve of a man, be he ever so strong.

Fernand had met storm and disaster in his life, he had lived through the great hurricane of five years before, when the northern reef was swept, the houses destroyed, and half the coconut trees flattened, but

that was nothing to him beside this absolutely unimagined happening.

They were without food, without water, and at full flood, hours hence, they would be submerged. The water would only be a foot or two high on the back of the bank, but if there was any wind the waves would sweep them.

When they were missed there would be a search; but they might not be missed for hours and the search might go the wrong way. And it was his act that had brought her to this. He ought never to have done it. Leaving other things aside, there was always the chance of squalls. But he had not thought of that; starting from the pearling grounds she had not been to him what now she had suddenly become at the touch of danger.

From where they stood the sand-bank, white as salt, ran east and west for twenty or thirty yards. It was twenty yards broad, and the wind, gently blowing, passed over it with a sigh like the rustling of silk. Beyond, on every side, lay an infinite expanse of water, and on the water, growing momentarily less, the wreck of the canoe. The gulls had flown away, frightened by the presence of the humans on that unfrequented spot, though on the reef they showed far less regard for man, a curious fact illustrating the power of the perplexing to stimulate fear.

The girl was the first to speak. She had kicked off her shoes.

"They'll dry quick," said she, "in this sun. Fortunate I kept my hat. Oh, I'm all right—I'm almost dry already, and salt water doesn't hurt—but I can't stand soggy shoes. But you have lost your hat."

"It doesn't matter," said he, "I'm used to the sun, and, besides, the wind has taken the heat away, it has changed a bit."

The wind, in fact, had shifted a point and strengthened, blowing now from the full south and bringing the cool of the outer sea.

The girl sat down, her feet almost touching the ripples, and after another glance round, he took his place beside her.

Seen from a distance, they might have been a holiday couple on a white summer beach. It only wanted children digging in the sand to complete the picture. But here there were no children; here there was nothing but the sand and the sea and the wind blowing the sand, and sure death if there were not swift release.

And they knew it, and they could do nothing. They talked a little while of the possibilities.

"Lipi," said Fernand, "saw us leave the pearling grounds, he saw the direction we took; when we don't come back he will be able to tell them—if he remembers."

This implied doubt of the mental powers of Lipi did not soothe the girl, but she dared not speak of the subject or make inquiries. Then came the vision of the *California* and Cyrus, absolutely unconscious of her position. What would he do if she never came back, if the wind strengthened that night with the tide and the waves swept them away?

For a moment she almost broke down under this thought. She turned her head away and he knew. He took her hand, as he might have taken the hand of a child, and held it in his as if to protect her from the brooding Death that stood

there viewless in the brilliant sunlight, yet voiceful in the wind and the silky whisper of the wind-blown sand.

A stray gull, passing, hailed them as if in mockery. The girl moved and withdrew her hand, and he rose, standing and looking far and wide across the lagoon. Nothing. Yet stay, what was that? That brown speck away to the west, carried as the log had been carried, on the sinister current that had taken their broken craft.

He stood, his eyes sheltered by his hand, and the girl, who had risen and was standing beside him, gazed too.

In the dazzle of the water the thing showed long and narrow, and now, as it shifted and bobbed on the little waves that the south wind was creating, it showed—no—yes, there, sure enough, were the curved outrigger bars—a canoe.

Some fishing canoe drifted away from the beach, maybe weeks, maybe months ago, drifted out, caught in the maze current and held, always moving, always drifting, yet unable to escape.

It was coming towards them, but it would not ground on the sand-bank; it would pass a cable-length away, but that was nothing, Fernand could swim.

Plainly visible now, it was a small canoe, different from this one just wrecked in the connection with the outrigger.

There was no bridge—just two curved sticks; and there was no trace of mast, but she was big enough to hold two, that was the main thing.

"She comes," said Fernand at last. "I'll have to strike out against the current and meet her, taking the paddle with me. It's well we brought it ashore,

it is likely there is not a paddle in her, and withou one she would be no use."

He gazed for a moment, judging the distance an speed of the oncoming canoe. Then, paddle in hand he waded in and struck out.

June watched him, scarcely breathing, her lip dry. The thought of being left here alone shoul anything happen to him gripped her literally by th throat. Should the current be too strong for him should a shark——

His head vanished for a moment—no! it ha reappeared, and now the canoe was bearing down o him, it was over him, it had run him down, he wa lost. No, the canoe was rotating: driving stern firs it was twisting round to an opposite position wit regard to the run of swell, and a hand was clingin to the gunnel.

He had dived to get to the opposite side from th outrigger, that was all.

Now she saw him working his way aft a bit, an then getting on board, a delicate job, but nothing t such a practised canoe man.

He waved the paddle to her, and she cried out i answer, hailing him across the wind-swept wate A month of companionship could not have joine them together more firmly than those few hours o tense life with Death fishing for them, and Thirs standing before them, with his grim smile an empty jug.

She could have flung her arms around Fernand a he brought the canoe nose on to the sands, and helping her on board, pushed off again, but he arms were required for other work.

There was a spare paddle and an unstepped mas in the derelict, but no sail. She was, in fact, a

Fernand had imagined, the property of some fisherman drifted off from either the northern beach or the village that lay on the southern; however that may have been, the spare paddle was a god-send, it gave them two arms instead of only one, also the wind was with them. The steadily-blowing south wind had increased into a strong sailing breeze, and between breeze and paddles they were making a full four knots.

June, on the sand-bank, had begun to feel the first threatening pangs of thirst. She felt thirsty no longer, and said so.

"It is the mind," said Fernand. "Men's minds get thirsty before their bodies. Look, it will not be long now." He pointed to where the palm tops were showing; also, and a bit to starboard, the masts of the *California* were clearly visible.

It was only a matter of an hour or so now, and she would be on board again, and this thought, acting upon the practical mind of June, brought the material side of the adventure uppermost before her.

Fernand had lost his canoe.

Also he had a partner, and the partner would have had a share in the craft.

Neither of them could afford to lose over this business, yet she did not like to offer him money. After all that had happened, how could she bring up the subject of dollars? She felt his hand chill in hers—his strong protecting hand; she saw again his form swimming out, fearless of sharks, heedless of all things but her rescue. How could she offer to pay him for that canoe? No, she couldn't. But Cyrus could. Cyrus could put the matter right—yes, if she told her stepfather, he could, in his business

way make everything good—and yet, curious enough, the idea of speaking to Cyrus on the matt at all was repugnant to her. She would have speak of Fernand as though he were an ordina common boatman.

He was not that. Not that to her. Her hea had gone out to him. He was the only man wh ever had made her feel like that.

And they had known each other only a few hou but it was as though all their lives they had be coming one towards the other, each incomplet each bearing something that the other lacked.

Fernand knew this just as she did, but he sa nothing and she said nothing.

As a matter of fact it was not the hour for speec the handling of the canoe had become more difficu owing to a slight cross-sea, made by the wind, pili against a streak of rapidly-flowing current due the curve of the beach, and when they had reache the smoother-going shore water and were almost hail of the *California* there was no time.

The landing stage was still down, and Fernan brought them alongside it and held fast whilst sh stepped on to the gratings.

"I want to see you again to-morrow, to than you," said she, leaning down slightly towards hi and dropping her voice ever so little; "but I nev can thank you enough."

Fernand looked up and into her eyes, and told h everything that was in his heart, without utterin a word.

"To-morrow, yes, to-morrow," he said; "but the is nothing to thank me for—to-morrow."

He glanced up again and pushed off, and sh watched him go, and as she watched him the wor

was filled with a new light more strange and wonderful than the light of the sun.

CHAPTER XI

THE PEARL MERCHANT

FERNAND was not deceived when he thought that he saw Yakoff being rowed off to the *California* that morning.

The dealer had determined on a visit to the yacht to see whether any business could be done with the owner.

He took some pearls with him on the chance of a sale.

Now sales of this sort are very ticklish affairs.

Generally, good prices can be got from a yacht-owner in a foreign port, a monkey, a parrot or a pearl often fetching more under these circumstances than in London or Paris, but the difficult part of the business is the payment of any large sum. Gold or dollar notes must be paid unless the seller is a fool, and it is not often that a yacht carries with her more than the necessary ship money.

However, one never could tell, and Yakoff, when he clawed alongside the *California*, had hopes of a good deal.

He didn't ask for the owner, he wasn't such a fool; he got his canoe man to bring the canoe along the stage and, before the quartermaster on duty could run down, he came up the grated steps and on to the deck.

The deck of the *California* intrigued Yakoff. It was white as the beach, showing on either side the rails and the boats swung at their davits.

Why, the man who owned this must be a millionaire many times over! The deckhouse took his eye, with its polished panelling, and, beyond the deckhouse, he could see just the top of the jackstaff from which the Stars and Stripes was curling and uncurling on the breeze.

"I want to see the owner," said Yakoff to the Yankee quartermaster.

"And what do you want to see the owner about?" asked the latter, looking the newcomer up and down and not with favour.

"Pearls," said Yakoff. "Tell the owner that Mr. Yakoff Abrahamovitch has come on board with some pearls to show him; and you'd better be moving quick, mister, for my time is not my own this morning. Your owner expects me."

"What's that?" said Cyrus Hardanger, who was writing a letter in the deckhouse, and who looked up as the quartermaster delivered the message. "Guy come on board to sell pearls by appointment. I never made any appointment. No, keep him, I'll be out when I've finished this letter and have a talk to him."

When he came out he found Yakoff meekly waiting.

"Well," said Cyrus, "what can I do for you?"

Yakoff, at the full sight of the other (he had only glimpsed him at a distance till now), started slightly. He had seen Cyrus before, but where, for the moment, he could not tell. His vulture-like mind was for a moment at fault. He had seen Cyrus years ago, surely, but where?

"I have come," said Yakoff, "to show you some Araffura pearls."

"You said you came by appointment."

"You see," replied Yakoff, "I am a salesman."

The impudence of the other amused Cyrus.

"That is to say, a liar."

"The truth is the pearls are very fine and a bargain. I was only pushing the truth," said Yakoff. "Moreover, they will be a memento of your visit to Araffura. Will you not look at them?"

"Come in," said Cyrus. He led the way into the deck-house, and Yakoff, putting his hand into his pocket, produced a small white box. He opened it, and raising a layer of cotton wool, exposed two pearls, perfect rounds, one pure white, one pink.

Now ninety per cent. of pink pearls are irregular in shape. Yakoff stated this fact—which Cyrus already knew—then he went on: "This pearl was not taken from an oyster but from a great conch, that is the true home of the pink pearl, and to get the conch out of its shell without injuring the pearl is a difficult matter. We hang the shell up and fasten a weight by a hook to the meat and it is slowly drawn out——"

"How much do you want for the two?" cut in Cyrus.

"Four hundred for the pink, two hundred for the white."

"Dollars?"

"Pounds."

Cyrus replaced the cotton wool and closed the box, handing it back. As he did so Yakoff saw that the last phalanx of the little finger of Cyrus' left hand was missing. It was not a noticeable mutilation, the finger being nearly always bent into the palm, but it was enough for Yakoff, he knew now where he had seen Cyrus before, and under what tragic circumstances. Twenty years and more ago when he, Yakoff, was a young man, thin and

cadaverous and utterly unlike the Yakoff of to-day, whilst Cyrus had altered, but not so much, altered and become a millionaire.

Yakoff hugged the suddenly-found remembrance, that might be worth so much to him if properly exploited, but he showed no sign either in face or manner.

"Take them," said Cyrus. "I can't trade at that price."

The other took the box.

"What price then would you be prepared to offer for these pearls?"

"Two thousand dollars," said Cyrus, "not a cent more. I don't want the things, specially; still, I'll give you two thousand. You won't get more in the market; they're good grade, but they're small."

"I'll think about it," said the dealer, putting the box in his pocket.

"Or I'll toss you double or quits," said Cyrus. "Four thousand or nothing." He meant what he said, and produced a coin to prove it, but the other only smiled.

"I'll consider that, too," said he. "If you will permit me I'll come on board again to talk it over."

"Oh, you can come on board," replied the owner of the *California*; "but don't come unless you are prepared to trade on my terms. A glass of wine? No? Well, good day to you."

"Good day," said Yakoff.

He came out on deck, got into the canoe, and pushed off for shore.

On the beach he turned and looked back at the graceful white yacht. Wealth at last! Wealth at last if he could only work this new-found knowledge without making a slip. No more trade without

ufficient capital to trade with, no more scraping bout the world for a living. No more work, and othing to do for it all but just take Cyrus Hardanger y the throat and squeeze him.

Yakoff's house was set back a bit from the others. oofed with palmetto leaves and with only two ooms, it was less a house than a habitation. It ast did him for the trading season and he paid Nari he owner ten dollars for the rent, and Nari's daughter id the cooking and kept the place clean; a case of n, a native-made bed, an old table and a couple of hairs were the chief movables. There was no rong box. He kept all his money and wealth on him.

Going in and shutting the door, he lay down on he bed to think this matter over and gloat on it, nd as he lay he became aware of the fact that Nari's aughter, careful though she might be in household natters, was careless of the outside. Everything ent on to the rubbish heap by the side wall, and he ould hear now the rustle of the robber crabs, and he click of them exploring old tins and pulling hem about; also he could hear the wind and the iny patter of palm fronds and, behind all, the eaking of the reef, that eternal voice which is the ackground of all other sounds at Araffura.

Lying on his back and listening to these things, akoff contemplated the business before him. Was e certain that the man he met to-day was the man f long ago? Certain. The name was changed, hat was nothing, the man was the same. The very ct that the name was changed was, if anything, n additional proof, for the man of years ago had vidently been going under an alias. No, there was o doubt as to the quarry, the only doubt was as to he hunting.

Yakoff was one of those cowards who becor savagely brave when cornered or in extremity. T idea of tackling this man in cold blood and threate ing him with his past frightened him now, that came to consider it as a working proposition and thing that had to be done.

It was most unpleasant.

He had been party to all sorts of swindles in h life, but this was blackmail. He felt as a cur d would feel, used to rabbit poaching and petty the but suddenly required to tackle a badger in barrel.

Would Cyrus bite?

How could he bite to hurt? Alone on the re with him there was no saying, but on board t yacht violence was out of the question. There we too many witnesses about, the sailors, the steward to say nothing of the canoe men who were alwa paddling round. There was no danger unless Cyr went suddenly mad and drew a six-gun or used knife; but that was absurd. He was sane and n the type of man to go fantee—didn't drink by t look of him. No, the thing was safe.

And yet Yakoff did not feel happy.

In fact, he felt so unhappy that he determined pull another man into the job to help him.

It was too big for one man.

He got off the bed and poured himself out a gi Then he started out to find Chales.

Chales did not live in the village, he lived beyo the canoe beach, in a house at the end of the seco line of palms. He was married to a native woma and he was a fixture, not one of the floati population that came and went with the pearli seasons.

He was a small sun-dried, quiet man, gone native, ntent to live on fish and bananas; all he seemed to emand of life was native food, a wife to do the little ork that was to be done, and an occasional drunk. e often went fishing, he liked fishing, but he did pearling. For one thing he was too lazy to dive, r another, not being a native born, he was de- rred from it.

He did jobs for Yakoff in return for gin. Yakoff, re many another scoundrel, had defects of vision regards the character of other men. Chales had ways seemed to him a "poor fish," a man ready d fit for any dirty job, but a man with no back- ne or bite about him. A gin soaker tied up with native woman and without initiative.

He felt safe in pulling Chales into this business. e wanted help; it was too big and dangerous a rden for one man to carry. Chales would come off ith him in the canoe when the hour had struck for e tackling of Cyrus. Without coming on board en he could render moral, if not material, support. ales need not be told too much, and at worst he uld always be silenced.

This last sinister thought slipped into Yakoff's ind and out again as he crossed from the village the canoe beach and on to the palm grove beyond hich lay Chales' house.

The native wife was at home, but Chales was hing. Not in the lagoon, where the fish just then ere unfit for food, but beyond the reef. He would t be back till evening.

"Tell him," said Yakoff, "that I wish to see him a matter that will not wait. Let him come to e directly on his return."

"I will tell him," replied the woman.

CHAPTER XII

REVERIE

FERNAND, when he left the girl that afternoon, c
not row directly ashore; he paddled a bit to the w
and grounded the canoe on the canoe beach near t
spot from which he had started that morning.

It was a bad day's work for himself and
partner; canoe and gear, including an anchor a
thirty fathoms of manilla rope, were gone. The
things not only cost money, but were hard to repla
especially in the pearling season, when every craft w
in commission and no man willing to hire or sell. T
canoe he had brought back was sure to be claim
by someone, either here or over on the other beach

Fernand was hungry and thirsty, but he did n
want to go to his house; he got some water from t
wife of Lipi, also some bananas and a piece of co
fried palu, and, going off to the outer beach, took
seat in the shade of a huge over-jetting lump of cor

The last great storm had smashed the reef here li
a hammer, great slabs of living coral with the wor
hanging from the fractured surfaces had been toss
here and there and piled to die and dry in the su
and the reef had gone on, rebuilding, remaking its
just as flesh remakes itself after a wound.

Fernand, when he had finished the food he h
brought with him, rested, contemplating the sea.

Here on the outer reef the world was a differe
world from that of the lagoon beach.

Near and far the breakers were coming in, a
above the breakers the spray hung in the wind, a
the spume drifted.

A frigate bird, passing high overhead, hailed the reef with a cry, and from far and near came the voices of gulls, creaking, complaining, lamenting like the souls of lost sailor men.

A huge crab, lifting itself from a pothole of the coral, rustled and clicked away, to be lost to sight behind a boulder. It was as though the reef had spoken and said: "Look, I am full of life, my very rocks are the homes of worms, the bass and schnapper lurk in my low-tide pools with the great eels, and worse. The lagoon has its sharks, but the safe and solid reef has its tigers and jackals. Beware!"

But Fernand was used to the reef and deaf to its voices, and he was thinking of something far remote from death.

He who had never looked at a girl was gazing at the vision of one now. Woman had taken her revenge.

It seemed to Fernand that this woman who had suddenly come into his life had always been part of his life. His love for her, newly sprung and of tropical growth, had obscured memory, or doped it or done something to it in a magical way, for she lent a tinge to his past as well as a light to his present.

And yesterday morning he had known nothing about her. Yesterday morning he had been pearling with Topi and the *California* had not even entered the lagoon.

The *California* had brought him a terrible gift. Should this woman go away and leave him he would die. She was the only thing in the whole world desirable, she was the only thing in the world—she was the world; all else, singing reef and speaking sea and coloured coral, what where they? Nothing —only a sound and a picture. All else, pearls and money and clothes and cigarettes, what were they?

Nothing. Everything but her was dead, at leas would be dead if she were to go away. And he ha no means of keeping her, and he knew in his hear that a great gulf lay between them, the gulf of wealt no less than of race and station.

He was only a pearl fisher, a man absolutel without hold on the world; he knew nothing. I was true he could read and he had read books, but o the life of the world he knew nothing. She had trie to explain San Francisco to him as though he wer a child. That is really what he was, a child withou station or money or power in the world, and marke with the stain of caste. All the same, and despit all this, there was in the mind of Fernand a fixe determination, away behind everything, a determina tion that belonged perhaps more to his subconsciou than to his conscious mind. She would be his Let her come or let her go, let him live or let him die she would be his. He watched the sun setting awa along the reef, and the gulls turning golden agains the blue of twilight, and the sudden passing of twi light to dark, and a sky all spangled with stars.

Then he rose up and came towards the village He wanted to find Topi and see how he was doin after his opium debauch. He came along to th house of Jalu and found the latter sitting outsid just as he had sat on the preceding evening.

"Jalu," said Fernand, "how is Topi?"

"Topi is still unwell," replied the other, speakin in the native; "no good for anything more."

Fernand pushed his way into the shack and ther lay Topi. He was unconscious; either he had go at more opium, or he had gorged an overdose yester day, it didn't matter which, he had taken too much He was no good for anything more, to judge by th

ook of him, and there was no doctor on Araffura or on board the *California*. The missionary was he only doctor now, and he was away.

Growing anger filled the mind of Fernand as he ooked at his unfortunate pearling mate and thought f Yakoff. This was Yakoff's work, done for a few ollars. Even in this lonely bit of the world the ruth of that saying, "The love of money is the root f all evil," stood out in big letters.

It was always standing out here in big letters: bove the Chinks who sold sam-shu or dope, and the hites who sold whisky and gin faked from potato pirit, and the half-breeds who came—as they would ome later that season—to run gambling shops; it as always standing out and Fernand was sick of eading it.

He wanted now to find Yakoff and face him with is work. Wring his neck, law or no law. The panish blood at the heart of Fernand was hot and oiling, yet his mind had not lost control.

Yakoff was a pest and a danger, Yakoff had in-ulted him by calling him a kanaka, and had all but illed his partner by selling him or giving him dope. ll the same Yakoff must not be killed.

A thrashing. That was it. He turned away and, icking from the beach a piece of stick seaweed hree feet long, an inch thick at the base, and flexible s rubber, he made for Yakoff's house.

CHAPTER XIII

YAKOFF'S HOUSE

THE beach was lighting up. Ah Sin, the Chinaman's, howed, casting an oblong of yellow light on the white

sands. Here you could have drinks of sorts or play a dominoes; he sold coffee, and he sold other things a well. A rival shop had just opened, run by Mexican, and away along towards the break glimmer showed where native talent had erected sort of coconut shy lit by two flare lamps.

But all this was nothing to what it would be in week or so, when the season was fully opened, an the Papeete schooner in with its pearl buyers an junk sellers—riff-raff from the four corners of th earth.

The beach was quiet to-night and Fernand, as h passed between the houses towards the house o Yakoff, was unobserved.

The house of Yakoff was closed—at least the doo was—but through the cracks lamplight was visible and as Fernand paused for a moment before knock ing, he heard Yakoff's voice and a voice which h knew to be that of Chales.

The two bad characters of Araffura talkin together with the door shut!

Doors here were used to keep out the wind, whe it was blowing, the sand, or the rain; on a warm windless night like this, doors were generally left ope

Fernand paused for a moment in thought. H had not the least compunction about listening, ther are no rules of the game in shark fishing. He move away from the door and came along round th eastern side of the house where there was a smal window-space without glass, veiled across with thic white muslin.

Here the voices could be heard much clearer.

Putting his ear to the thin wall was like comin right into the room where they were talking. H could hear everything.

"No, you just wait a moment," Yakoff was saying, one more gin you'll have and that's the last o-night, and you won't have it till you're going, and ou won't have any more till the job's through. After that you'll have as much as you want and five undred dollars for keeps. Here, take a cigarette."

"It's not the gin I'm bothering about, but the ob," said Chales.

"And what's the job? Nothing. You've only to ow off with me and keep the canoe alongside whilst 'm on board; if the man should try to scrag me and ou hear me shout, you'll lay aboard and call the rew—but there'll be nothing of that. When I ell him I have a pal alongside who's in the know, it vill be enough for him. He'll pay up without quealing."

"Yes," said Chales, "but I'm not in the know. That's the bother. You say you've got a grip on his chap Hardanger for something he's done way ack years ago, and you're going to squeeze him nd make him pay up on condition you keep mum. You've seen him face to face and talked to him, yet ou say he didn't recko'nise you—how's that for a tory?"

"I tell you he didn't. I'm changed in looks since hen and I wasn't much mixed in that affair; when e did the killing I wasn't along with him."

"Oh, so it was killing," said Chales, with a laugh. I thought I'd get it out of you."

There was silence for a moment.

Yakoff had evidently miscalculated the abilities f Chales; the simple drunkard and beachcomber, eady to do any dirty job to satisfy his gin lust, was omething more than a waster and a fool.

The silence was broken by a laugh from Yakoff.

"And a lot you've got," said he, "what does matter whether it was one thing or another. I'v put the proposition before you fair and square, fiv hundred dollars and free drinks for doing nothin but sitting quiet and keeping the ring, calling fo help if you hear me shout. You can chuck it if yo like."

"Oh, I ain't going to chuck it," said Chales, "it a lot too good a thing to chuck, and, as for killing, matters a lot. Killing means swinging. The cha Hardanger is busting with dollars, maybe he's wort a million, maybe he's worth ten; with that hangin on to him he'll part with half his money—and yo offer me a lousy five hundred dollars."

"Well, I'll take the offer back," said Yakoff.

"Then I'll crab your deal," said Chales, wit beautiful simplicity.

"You won't," said Yakoff, "you're a dam' cuttl fish, and sooner than have you hanging on to m I'll chuck the job."

"Chuck it, then," said Chales, "I'll take it o meself, with what I know and a bit of bluff——"

"Now don't you be a fool," said Yakoff. "There no sense in your talk, we're getting all crooked i this business; let's sit down to it as man to man, an if you want another drink to make things go eas there's the bottle."

"Not me," said Chales, "I'm done with that stu till I'll be able to pay for my own drinks. Loo at me, down and out, ain't I, living native, no goo for nothing—oh, Chales, he's no good for nothin but fishing and drinking and lazing; no brains, n kick. Well, you'll see. Do you think I ain't go the stuff in me to make a man of? Do you thin I've always been like this, on my back for chaps lik

ou to wipe your boots on? Oh Lord, you'll see. o, sir, I've been a man in my time, bigger than ou. I've lived flash and like a gentleman. It as, 'What's your drink, Mr. Chales?' in half the ars of N'Orleans, and Henry Clay cigars and licquot champagne by the bucket. Rolling in my arriage on the shell road and dinin' with Opera rls at Lafanes I was when you, you lousy Russian- ank, was what you were, pinchin' niggers for cents nd sellin' pea-nuts from a 'barra'. No, b'gosh, ve done with the beach and poor times, and it's alf-and-half with the swag, and not a cent under."

This amazing outburst of greed, hate and energy roduced a dead silence. Yakoff seemed to have een annihilated as though by a burst bomb-shell. hen came his voice:

"You are wrong. My boots have never been iped on any man. I am just a trader. I have een your friend—also it seems to me you have been n New Orleans——"

"Now cut that out," said Chales, "I have, but 've never done anything there I could be lagged or, and I wasn't moving under the name of Chales. ou thought you had me, didn't you? Well, tell you straight, there's no kinks in the past f Billy Chales that aren't buried deeper than your cratching will ever find."

"I meant nothing," said Yakoff, "let us bring this o a conclusion. We will share half and half, better o partner than an unwilling one. Half and half. ou have my word."

"I have better than that," said Chales. "You an't move an inch without me now. When do you ropose to do the squeezing?"

"That," replied Yakoff, "is the question I have

been putting to myself—perhaps to-morrow evening, perhaps the evening after. The yacht will not put out for some days yet."

"Giorno another sig.," said Chales.

Fernand drew away from the wall.

He had seen roguery and villainy enough in the last few years, but this thing left him stunned. He knew nothing of the detail, but even a child could have understood what was going forward here. Cyrus Hardanger had killed a man years ago and had evidently evaded the law, changed his name and made good. Yaloff had been mixed up in the affair but had evidently nothing to do with the killing. He had been left behind, so to speak, when Hardanger made his escape. And now he proposed to rob Hardanger of his fortune under threat of the law.

June had told him that Cyrus Hardanger was not her real but her step-father, all the same she loved him just as much as though he had been her real father.

And both June and Cyrus were there on the yacht, absolutely ignorant of what was going forward against them.

Should he take a canoe and go on board, even at this late hour, and warn them? Impossible. How could he speak to Cyrus before her. She knew nothing of the business, he was certain of that. It was Hardanger's secret, had been for years.

Fernand remembered a man who had come to Araffura three years before, a quiet, likeable man who had landed from the Papeete mail schooner and settled down, living on money that came to him from the outside world in remittances from a woman, so gossips said. Jameson was the name of this man

and, one day, as Jameson was going fishing in the lagoon, an officer of the French police who had come from Papeete arrested him and took him off. He was wanted for some crime committed many years ago.

So it would be with Cyrus Hardanger, unless something happened to paralyse the arm of Yakoff and muzzle Châles.

Fernand had never spoken to Cyrus, just seen him at a distance, all the same he was everything to the girl, what hit him would hit her. He had to be saved.

Fernand walked away along the beach, leaving the village and its lights behind him. He came to where the canoes were lying, the canoes of the pearlers whose day's work was done. The moon had risen and, by her light, he could see lying on the white beach the canoe of Lipi. Others were in the shelter of the canoe houses, but Lipi's lay there as if left on purpose to speak to him, and remind him of his own canoe and of the fate of Topi, his pearling partner, killed—or nearly killed—by the opium of Yakoff.

Then a great blaze of wrath shot up in the bosom of Fernand. Yakoff—Yakoff—always Yakoff. His southern blood boiled in him, and his hand went to the knife he always carried. Yakoff deserved death. Yakoff must die. In fair fight. Yes, he would give him a knife to defend himself with, but he would die all the same, even if he, Fernand, were to die also.

Then, of a sudden arose before the mind of Fernand—Chales!

Of what use would the death of Yakoff be if Chales were left? Fernand felt, that bad as Yakoff was,

Chales was equally bad or maybe worse. He could not kill them both!

He sat down, resting on a lump of coral to brood over this matter. His simple and ingenuous mind was utterly at fault, he could imagine nothing possible to be done.

Cyrus might be warned, but it was of no use. What could he do? If he were to put out from the island, Yakoff's hold on him would not be lessened. Yakoff, once having found him, would follow him.

Then, as he sat like this, thinking, or trying to think, something stirred in his mind and the recollection of Ona came to the surface.

Ona was the witch-woman of Araffura; she could tell the future for one and put on spells. She had wrecked Le Moan's canoe because the girl had laughed at her, at least a small waterspout in the lagoon had wrecked the canoe; she was also held to be familiar with the spirits of the dead. It seemed to Fernand that this woman, of all the people of Araffura, could alone help him. She would want her price, but he could pay it. He rose up and went to his house and lit the small oil lamp that served him as a light. Raising a board in the flooring he came upon a tin box and, opening it, took out a Swedish match-box.

He replaced the tin box and covered it with the board, then he brought the match-box to the light of the lamp, opened it, and, lifting the cotton-wool it contained, exposed a pearl.

It was his reserve fund, something he had kept for a rainy day. He had found it when fishing alone, before he had entered into partnership with Topi, and he had been tempted to realize it several times. He could have got enough for it to have taken him

for a trip to Papeete or even to San Francisco, he could have got enough to build the best house on Araffura, but he had always resisted the promptings to cash it. He put the cotton-wool over it again, put the box in his pocket, turned down the light and left the house.

CHAPTER XIV

ONA

The moon was now high above the reef and all the lights in the village were out, all but the light of the house where Topi lay in the clutch of Yakoff's opium.

Fernand turned to Topi's house, where he found his partner lying just the same, his pupils were like pin-points and he was still unconscious; a white man having swallowed a similar dose would have been dead by this, but amongst some of the islanders, and especially those with a Melanesian strain in them, there is tremendous power of resistance to the drug. All the same, it seemed to Fernand that Topi was hopeless. He turned away from the house more than ever determined to use all means possible against Yakoff.

It now wanted an hour of midnight, the wind had fallen and the breakers on the outer beach spoke less loud, whilst the moon, swinging high, made a ghostly day on the white sands that stretched from the village into the far star-sprinkled distance.

Fernand, leaving the canoes behind him, and the palm grove and Chales' house to the westward of the grove, struck into the night.

He had a long walk before him.

Ona did not live with her kind. She lived and fished alone far away along the reef where nothing came but the wind and the voices of the waves, and the spirits of the dead. Here she had her shack by an island of the reef.

These reef islands occur here and there on nearly all atoll reefs. They are simply enlargements of the coral, swellings where the coral spreads and on them there are generally trees.

Fernand, as he walked, kept close to the lagoon edge, the outer reef at night, like the edge of a forest is a place to be avoided. One never knows what may be lurking there or what may come in under the moon, even if it is nothing worse than a bigger lump of swell.

Crabs scuttled away before the night-walker and had he paused and turned, he might have seen crabs gazing at him amidst the coral rocks to the right "spirit crabs," white as ivory, on stilt-like legs with eyes like ruby points.

But he did not turn, not even when suddenly, far out on the lagoon water, a jet of foam showed, followed by a concussion like the report of a big gun. One might have fancied that a battleship out at sea was making a target of the lagoon.

But Fernand knew it was only a big ray jumping, a huge flat-fish weighing a ton or more. There were two of them in the lagoon. Sometimes a school of them would come in and, should they take to playing, the noise would be heard miles out at sea, but to-night there were only two, and after a few minutes they ceased play, and the night resumed its silence.

Now, far ahead, Fernand could see the clump of trees where Ona lived, and now he could make out

the shack where the old woman slept, and the canoe drawn up under its little shelter-house, and now a spark showed which turned out to be the light of a tiny smudge fire, beside which the old woman was crouching, as though waiting for him.

She was in reality watching something hung to dry from a tripod of sticks above the smudge fire. Ona carried on three businesses. She fished, she collected beach curios such as conch-shells, and sold them in the rush season, and she did a side-line in magic.

The Chinks often came to her if out of luck, just as people go to a doctor to get a tonic if out of health. She sold charms, and she could undoubtedly "do things."

Selincourt, the lieutenant of the French gunboat that visited the island, could have told a good deal about the doings of Ona before he died. He was a superstitious Frenchman, and legend said he had bought luck from her, anyhow he became chief officer in the station shortly after the supposed bargain, but he died soon after that.

There was also the case of the Dutchman, Poll, who was very thick with her, and who prospered for a while, only to wilt. As a matter of fact, though this woman was sought after considerably, people came to her more for peeps into the future and spells against drowning and so forth, than for aid in getting rich, for it was felt that the luck she brought, though a thing of fast and furious growth, was sure to wither like a fairy plant and bring disaster perhaps in the withering.

Fernand quite believed in her. His simple and almost childlike mind accepted her as genuine. He rather feared her. This was the first time he had

ever sought her advice or assistance, and he would never have done so for his own sake.

He stood before her as she crouched beside her fire and, as he stood, a flaw of the wind brought a wreath of the smoke against his face, making him catch his breath and cough.

"I knew you were coming," said Ona, glancing up at him without raising her head.

"How knew you that?" asked he.

"I saw you when you were far away," she replied, with a little laugh.

This seeming disparagement of her own powers did not ease Fernand's mind a bit.

"You have come to me for help and advice," said Ona, throwing a bit of dried seaweed and a morsel of hibiscus stick on the embers of the little fire. "Make known what you want, for it is late, and my cooking is near done, and I must sleep."

Fernand looked at the thing round which the smoke was curling in the moonlight. It was a head, but too small even for a baby's head, possibly the head of some sea creature—who could tell?

The drying in the smoke every night, assisted by the sun during the day, must have taken a long time, perhaps a week; but time was nothing to Ona.

"Yes," he said at last, "I have come to you for help. You know Yakoff, the trader?"

"Yes," replied Ona, "sit down beside me."

He sat down beside her on the coral.

"Now take my hand," said she, "that I may read your thoughts."

He took her hand.

The sea spoke loud on the outer reef, and the wind curled the smoke of the smudge fire beneath the

moon, and a cry came from some night-fishing gull beyond the reef.

"One—two," said Ona, as if counting. "Yakoff —and another, there is another in your mind."

"Yes, the man Chales."

"And there is another."

"Yes, the man who came in the white ship that lies off the village."

"And there is another?"

"Yes, there is another," replied Fernand. He was thinking of June. "There are four people in my mind, Ona. Yakoff and Chales, and the man of the white ship and a woman that is with him.

"Yakoff and Chales are set to destroy the man and the woman. That is why I have come to you for help. I have brought you that which I value most in payment for your help." He released her hand and produced the box with the pearl.

Ona looked at the pearl, but she did not touch it. She knew its value at a glance.

"Here," said she, "are all things desirable that a young man can want, yet you would give them to the winds so that those two may be held safe. Yours is a clean heart—but I—I can do nothing. I have no power over death or destruction. I can only say do this, or do that. Put it away. Now give me your hand and let me get into to-morrow."

She took his hand, held it and, crouching into herself, fell silent. She seemed asleep. A minute passed, and then, with a little shudder and releasing his hand, she spoke.

"I have seen. To-morrow should Yakoff come to me to ask me for a spell to give him luck in the business he has on hand, and this he may do, for he is a believer in these things—I will give it to him."

"You would help him?"

"Surely. For in that way only can he and the other man, his companion in this business, be brought to nothing and their plans made waste."

"You would help him to destroy the man and woman?"

"No," said Ona. "I would leave him to destroy himself. Let this thing be as I have said. Take no hand in it. The Dark People are working to make Yakoff's path easy, but they have prepared a hole for him like that in the coral by the four trees. Now go."

Fernand sprang to his feet as she rose. She went to the tripod and took the head, wrapping it in a piece of sennit. She seemed to have forgotten Fernand's presence, and turning, he went off, taking his way back to the village.

He felt like a swimmer being swept out to sea in the grip of the current. His simple and straightforward mind could not understand the subtleties of Ona, he had grasped at her for help and she had failed him.

Where an old lone coco palm had fallen in the storm of last year he paused and, taking his seat on the trunk, plunged into thought, his head between his closed fists. The dawn was coming into the sky when he rose, grasping a newly-formed plan. He had a weapon at last, Topi. If Topi died in the night from the effects of the opium procured from Yakoff, he would go to the French authority and denounce Yakoff, also Chales as being party to Yakoff's business transactions.

They would both be taken off to Papeete and tried. Fernand had seen several bad whites taken off to Papeete for trial before the courts and for offences less than this.

He rose up, buoyed by this plan. It was sunrise when he reached the village and behold, nearly the first person he met was Topi, not dead, but sitting outside his house in the rays of the new-risen sun.

The opium that would have killed two other men had failed to kill Topi. As a matter of fact, he was as tough as an alligator, but to Fernand it seemed that the Dark People mentioned by Ona had brought him back to life, thus clearing Yakoff's path of an obstacle that might have blocked it.

He forgot that Topi was his friend and partner, turned and walked away with scarcely a greeting and, coming down to the lagoon edge, stood and looked at the yacht swinging at her moorings and with her bow to the incoming tide.

A white figure stood at the taffrail, it was June; she was sweeping the beach to westward with a pair of glasses, then her eye caught Fernand's figure and she levelled the glasses in his direction, recognised him and raised a hand in greeting.

CHAPTER XV

JUNE EXPLAINS.

Now yesterday, when June stepped on board the yacht, having parted from Fernand, she found her step-father seated in a cane chair under the shadow of the awning, an iced drink was at his elbow, a cigar in his mouth and the *Pacific Magazine* in his hand.

"Been having a good time?" asked Cyrus.

"Rather," said she. "Been wrecked, nearly drowned—look at my shoes, they'll never be right again—and only escaped from death by thirst and starvation through the narrowest squeak."

He thought she spoke in jest. Her long absence had not alarmed him, he was used to her going off for days alone, either in the Bay or at Santa Barbara or Santa Catalina, where he sometimes went for the tuna fishing. At Santa Catalina she had once been away for a whole night with old Jake Tranter, the boatman, on the west side where the kelp forests are. Their petrol engine had broken down. Cyrus never worried, the weather was good like to-day, and he knew her capacity for taking care of herself.

"Sit down," said he, "and tell us of it, but aren't you hungry? you've missed your luncheon."

"No, I'm not hungry," she dropped into a chair beside him as she spoke, "but I'm thirsty."

He called the steward for another glass and she went on.

"You saw us start off this morning. Fernand——"

"That young kanaka boatman chap in flannels?"

"He's not a kanaka, he's Spanish, and he's not a boatman, he's a gentleman."

"Oh, is he?" said Cyrus, amused at the tone of the other, "but I don't see why he couldn't be both, some of the Avalon long-shore crowd are the best gentlemen I know."

"I meant," said June, "that he is not a common man. Of course you are right, Arkansas Joe and old Jake Tranter for instance, are gentlemen, but they are rough diamonds."

"And this one is polished. Go ahead."

"No, thank goodness he's not polished. I loathe polished men. He's just himself with a mind and a personality of his own, not an imitation mind and an imitation personality got from college and society. Well anyhow, we went first to see the pearling grounds and then we pushed off to see the lagoon. We went

so far out there towards the centre that we lost sight of the shore. There was a sand-bank near us.

"Out there, in the middle, there is a sort of circular current and driftwood and stuff that gets caught in it, can't get out.

"He was telling me this when a blind shark ran into us and smashed the canoe."

"A blind what?"

"Shark. They mutilate sharks here so as to frighten the others away when pearling is going on. Why, you remember, you first told me about them. Well, we had to swim to the sand-bank and there we were, without food or water, out of sight of shore, and we might have been there still only an old derelict canoe that was trapped in the current came along and Fernand swam out to it at the risk of his life and brought it ashore."

"Risk of his life! Confound the chap, he risked yours."

"How?"

"Taking you to such a place in a damn dug-out—blind shark, rot! He ran you on a reef."

"No," said June, "he didn't. I saw the shark."

"Shark or no shark, there's always the chance of squalls. These islands are the most treacherous in the whole Pacific."

"But you didn't bother about that when we started."

"No, for I thought a native boatman would have savvy enough to keep out of danger."

June was silent for a moment. She sensed the fact that Cyrus was less up against the supposed dangers of the place than against Fernand. She had managed to put him in some way against Fernand.

"Well, anyhow," she said, "he did what he could

and he risked his life by swimming off when there were sharks about and bringing the canoe ashore."

"I'm not saying anything against the fellow but that he was a fool to get out so far with you in that dough-dish of an outrigger," replied Cyrus. "Let's talk sense and don't make heroes out of nothing. He'd got to get himself away from that sand-bank, hadn't he? Well, there you are. Anyhow, you're back safe and there's an end of the business."

He took to his magazine again whilst she rose and went below.

An end of the business! Those words came to her strangely. No, indeed, it was not the end of the business.

It seemed to her as though she had started from the old track of life on to a line leading her into an entirely new country. Nothing was the same, nothing would ever be the same, since—when? Was it last night, at almost first sight, or away there out on the lagoon, or just now, when he had looked up at her before pushing off back to shore in the canoe?

She could not tell.

Just as Fernand had never looked at a woman before seeing her, so she had never looked at a man before seeing Fernand.

Men had been companions or just society figures. The young men of Pacific Avenue and the Clubs had been different from the men of the bay, the sailors, boatmen and oyster-fishers. She preferred the latter, that was all.

Fernand had come upon her as something absolutely and entirely new, yet all the same it was as though she had been waiting for him ever since she was born—ay, and before that.

Dressing for dinner that night it seemed extraordinary to her that he should be there on the beach, maybe cooking his own food, living in one of those little hut-like houses, and at dinner the glitter of glass and silver, the white-coated stewards, the elegance of the surroundings all struck her strangely, seeming to demarcate her position in the scheme of things, a position separated by a deep gulf from that of the man whose image had become part of her mind.

There is no barrier more severe than that of class distinction, none more absurd if the separated people match in mind—and, as for class, what difference was there really between herself and this man? What had Cyrus been? Just a sailor before he had made his pile; a rover about the world who, according to his own laughing confession, had sometimes run very close to windward of the Law.

Fernand was a pearler, a worker it is true, but perhaps of a nobler type than even Cyrus.

These thoughts came through her head with no trace of disloyalty towards the man she had loved best in the world up to this, and she showed nothing of them.

She did not mention Fernand more, she knew instinctively that her stepfather had a dislike to the new man who had suddenly entered their world, a dislike based, perhaps, on some vague subconscious suspicion that here perhaps was the man who would take June away from him.

Her talk that afternoon had perhaps betrayed her mind.

Next morning, as we have seen, up soon after sunrise, the girl went to the taffrail to watch the pearlers put out. She was sweeping the canoe

beach with the glasses when, seeing Fernand standing on the beach, she waved her hand in recognition; he returned the greeting.

CHAPTER XVI

BAD MEN

THEN, yielding to a sudden impulse, he made a sign that he was coming over to speak to her.

A fishing canoe lay close to him on the sands. It belonged to Sru, the father of Lipi, and it was waiting for its owner. Fernand pushed it off and got into it and paddled towards the yacht. Canoes were often borrowed like this on the beach and Sru would not mind so long as it was brought back quickly. But Fernand was not thinking of that. He had come to a sudden decision. The girl must be warned about Yakoff and the danger to Cyrus. It was a prompting of the heart not of the head. Even if Cyrus were frightened into action of some sort against Yakoff, what could he do? Yakoff had not yet declared himself, and when he did, it would be secretly in the presence of Cyrus and with no witnesses. Then there was Chales. Chales was in the business and ready to carry on if anything happened to the other.

Even if Cyrus were to put out and run away from the island, would not these men be able to follow him at their leisure, go to San Francisco and blackmail him there? The owner of the *California* would be a man of mark in 'Frisco, the very wharf rats would know his address.

No, Cyrus was held by what he had done in the past. These wretches alone knew the fact. Unless they

were destroyed they would use their knowledge and Fernand could not destroy them. Any warning would be useless.

Absolutely, Ona's advice to let them alone to work their plan, trusting in the "Dark People" to trip them up, seemed the best advice possible, the Dark People maybe being her symbol of their own wickedness.

But Fernand, having made up his mind, was not to be stopped.

He brought the canoe up to the stage that had been lowered. June, seeing him putting off, had come down the steps and was standing on the grating as he came alongside.

"Yesterday," said Fernand, after he had given her greeting, "when I told you of the rock pools on the outer beach and when you said you would like to see them, I did not tell you the best time. The best time is just when the tide is half out. That would be this afternoon, at three o'clock."

"Oh," said June, "I'll see if I can come."

"I wish very much for you to come," said he, "it is important. It has to do with your ship."

June saw at once that Fernand was holding something back, also, that whatever his object was it had little to do with her personally. Something to do with the ship. What could that be? Some instinct told her that whatever it might be, it was important; it seemed to her for a moment as though danger were hiding somewhere, danger to the *California* and Cyrus and herself, danger behind that veil of sapphire sky, that picture of blue water, white beach and waving palm trees.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There are bad men at Araffura. I cannot tell

you more here in this place." He glanced up at the yacht's side. A quartermaster was leaning on the rail, and a fellow in a bo'sun's chair had been lowered to touch up some paint at the bow; from below came the sound of metal striking metal, the auxiliary engine had been taken down and was being repaired, and from the galley the clatter of pots and cans. No, it was not the place for a confidential conversation.

"Shall I bring father?" she asked—she always called Cyrus father.

Fernand shook his head.

"No," he said, "I cannot tell what I have to tell if there is more than you. It is another man's secret I am dealing with."

This happy flash of inspiration saved the situation. June saw that under those circumstances it would not do to press any inquiries. She nodded.

"Yes, I'll come. I will row ashore at three."

"At three," said Fernand. He saluted her and pushed off with the paddle, making for the beach.

June followed him with her eyes. She knew that he loved her; that glance up at her last night as he pushed off had told her not of love but of sudden adoration. Just so. Well, why was he changed this morning—all his brightness gone, no smile for her, almost abrupt in his departure? He seemed like a man under some heavy weight of care. What could have happened to change him so? Something had happened and it had to do with the *California* and with "bad men"; or rather something was going to happen. If there was any meaning in what Fernand had said, there was danger to be countered; yet why did he ask her not to bring Cyrus to the meeting?

Ought she to tell Cyrus right away?

No. Of one thing she was quite sure, she could trust Fernand. He told her to come alone, and he had, no doubt, his reason. She could trust him, she, who had let him take her heart, could give him also her confidence in this matter.

All the same she was disturbed in mind. It seemed to her that ever since coming to this place it had been disclosing itself to her, always bringing the unexpected to match the unexpected and Death and Terror into contrast with beauty and peace.

She never could have dreamed of this great lake of water so full of colour, of peace and of loveliness. Neither could she have dreamed of the blinded shark, that revelation of Ferocity mutilated by Ferocity.

Leaning on the rail now and looking over she could see sand-patches and brain coral and flights of coloured fish.

Such a pretty sea garden, the fish shadows flitting from flower to path, yet there, tilted and agape, she could see a vast shell-fish, the twin brother of the great clam Fernand had shown her on the pearling grounds—an iron trap that would take a man by the foot or by the hand and hold him till he was drowned.

Then there was the circular current, another trap for the canoe man who should lose his paddle or his sail; and now there was this hinted warning of Fernand's about bad men, a whisper from that beach so placid looking and sunny, with the children playing in the morning light, the cooking fires sending their smoke to the flower-blue sky and the palms waving to their shadows on the sand.

All these things, seen and hinted at and remembered, were belonging to Araffura, a complex and terrible little world that yet at sight seemed only just a ring of coral and a strew of trees.

At breakfast she spoke little, in contrast with Cyrus. She had never seen him more bright of mind, more filled with the joy of life. He seemed fey. He had been ashore for awhile yesterday morning and he talked of the possibilities of the place. He said he would like to buy it, buy it for a bathing beach, put up a big hotel and run a special steamer to connect it with San Francisco and Santa Barbara.

June shuddered at the thought.

"You would only want sky signs and advertisements of chewing gum and cigarettes to complete it," said she. "Dad, how can you say such things?"

"It wouldn't be worse than what it is," replied he. "This is nothing now to what it will be in a few weeks time when the pearling season is fully open. That beach will be like a fair then with half the scallywags and ruffians of Europe and America come to dicker for the pearls these chaps will be having for sale."

June thought of the bad men mentioned by Fernand.

"Do those sort of people come here?" she asked.

"Come here? Of course they come here. Wherever there's easy money you'll find them, pearls or gold or diamonds, it's all the same—or phosphates," he finished with a laugh.

It was out of phosphates he had made his own fortune, and June knew it, and somehow now the mention of the word, and the laugh which came with it, jarred on her. He seemed to be connecting himself mentally with "those sort of people"—the scallywags of Europe and America who were to be found always where money was easy and to be had for the handling of gold or pearls or diamonds—or phosphates.

But she said nothing.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE REEF

SHE occupied her morning by doing needlework, seated under the double awning, aft. Needlework to her was a time-killer, better than gum chewing or Patience, or the working of acrostics. Anyhow, it was at least useful. This heiress to the millions of Cyrus Hardanger worked for the poor with her needle; garments she had cut and sewn covered many an unfortunate child in San Francisco. You might say that she might as easily have given a cheque; yes, she might as easily have given a cheque (and many a cheque she had extracted from Cyrus for her charities), but you see a cheque is not the same thing as personal work. It is like touching the poor with a barge pole, not with one's hand.

At a quarter to three she fetched her sun hat, and calling a quartermaster, ordered him to tell off a man to take her ashore in the dinghy.

Cyrus was asleep in a hammock swung beneath the awning, she did not wake him, and telling the quartermaster that she would be back by half-past four, in time for tea, she came down the steps to the boat-stage against which the little white dinghy was nuzzling and rubbing its fenders.

"Take it back," said she to the man when she landed. "You can row off for me when you see me signal. Tell the quartermaster to keep a look out."

Then she turned to the left, coming along by the houses in the direction where she saw Fernand waiting for her.

They met as if by accident. To an onlooker it

was just as though she had come ashore for a walk and had met him by chance. More especially as he stood by her for awhile pointing here and there as though showing her places of interest.

"It was better for me not to come down to the boat to meet you," said he. "One does not know what eyes are watching, even now they may be on us so we will stand for a moment as though I were showing you the place, pointing so and so, and now we can go on, but walk slowly. Follow me on to the coral and take care that you do not slip."

She followed him.

The tide was going out and the outer beach was showing exposed rock glittering in the sun. The world here was quite different from the world of the inner beach; here there was sound and movement and the fume of the sea; the thunder of the breakers and the cry of the gull on the wind.

Here, too, were reef pools left by the retreating tide—great baths, some of them, where a man might swim, others quite small, but all of them strange and beautiful with coloured life.

Fernand for a little while said nothing of the business in hand, he led the way across the coral, stopping here and there to point out things. In one of the newly-formed pools something grey and narrow was moving with vicious darts and plunges, now here, now there. It was a baby shark divorced from its mother by one of the chances of the sea. In another a great frilled eel made the water boil as their shadows disturbed it.

They were beyond the reach of human eye now, and Fernand, as if suddenly made sure of his environment, broke the silence.

"I told you," said he, "that there are bad men

here in Araffura who might do you and your father an injury, but I could not tell you all."

He stopped, embarrassed. He had not reckoned on the difficulty of the job he had taken in hand. How was he to tell this girl that Cyrus Hardanger, the man who had protected her from childhood, the man who was both father and mother to her—how was he to tell her that this man had broken the law, that he had killed a man and that those men who were pursuing him could perhaps put him in prison were they baulked and not bought off.

"Yes?" she said tentatively. Then as he hesitated: "Go on, why do you hold back, these men may do us an injury. How?"

"In this way," said he, "but first of all I must tell you how it happened that I know anything of this matter. When your ship came into the lagoon the other evening, I left the pearling grounds with my partner. I wanted to see your ship close, and then as we drew near I saw you. I spoke to you and promised to come for you in the morning to show you the pearling grounds."

"Yes?" There was a ledge of smooth coral here and she sat down. He took his place beside her.

"Well," he said, "I had seen you only once, but I was to see you for ever. Whatever happens to me, or to you, I shall see you in my mind just as you were then."

He took her hand and she let him hold it. He was not talking of love, he was just telling her the truth, and it applied to herself as well as to him. Whatever happened to her or to him, his picture would always be with her.

"When I went ashore," he said, "I found my

partner ill from opium given him by a man, Yakof the trader. I went to Yakoff's house to beat him and drawing near, I heard Yakoff's voice. He was talking to a man who lives on the beach, Chale is his name—bad, just as Yakoff is bad—and I heard your ship spoken of, and listened.

"Yes?" said June. He seemed to find it difficul to go on.

"It is hard to say to you what these two men were talking of. It was about your father."

"These men were talking about him. What did they say?"

"This is where I find it hard. Yakoff said to the other: 'I know him, many years ago he killed a man No one else knows but me and I will make him pay me money not to tell.'"

"Killed a man?"

"Yes. Those were Yakoff's words."

"Father—why, what nonsense. He could never kill anyone, unless it was accident. I know him I tell you I know him, he is the best of all the people who were ever born. What do you mean by telling me such things?——I know! forgive me—it's not your fault. It's what you heard—well——"

She sat for a moment looking before her at the falling breakers, now drawn further out.

Her mind was in confusion. The image of Cyrus was there but blurred as if by smoke clouds.

A trader here called Yakoff had said that Cyrus away in the past, had killed a man, and that he Yakoff, was going to make him pay, otherwise he would talk.

June had a clear thinking brain, and even shaken as it was just now she could perceive one thing clearly This charge could have nothing to do with accidenta

killing. If the thing had been an accident, there would be nothing to hide.

But of course it was all absurd—all absurd—Yakoff had made a mistake.

And yet, combating this consoling thought came the remembrance of the fact that Cyrus, half in jest, had once or twice indicated that his past had been not altogether on visiting terms with the Law.

He had told her he had done gun-running, but it was less what he had told than what he had left untold that was the trouble now.

As a matter of fact, she knew next to nothing of his life. He was not a communicative man, all the same he might have told much more to the girl whose life was so bound up with his, the girl who would be his heiress, the girl who, though not related to him by blood, was considered by him, and talked of by him, as his daughter.

He always called her his daughter, not his step-daughter, and she always spoke of him as her father.

She knew next to nothing of his past out of which this thunder-bolt had suddenly sprung to hit her.

As a matter of fact, June's position was not unique.

Amongst the ranks of the newly-got-rich and the millionaires who were nobodies the day before yesterday, the pasts of the fathers don't always bear raking up before the eyes of their children, but her position was none the less painful.

"Of course," she burst out at last, "all this is nonsense; has father seen this man?"

"Yes. I believe Yakoff went on board to sell pearls to him and so came to recognise him."

"Well, didn't my father recognise him in return."

"No. Yakoff said that he himself had altered in

the years. It was twenty years ago, but that your father had not altered much. It is so with men some change more than others."

She was silent for a minute.

"But how about the name?" she said at last.

"Yakoff said that your father was living under a different name then—excuse me for saying these things, they hurt me to say them."

He retook her hand which she had drawn away and she let him hold it, but it was unresponsive as a thing dead.

Love for the moment had flown far away.

"The thing now," said he, "is what we can do against Yakoff. I would kill him just as I would kill a shark, only he is not alone. There is the other man, Chales."

"We must tell father at once."

"I don't know," said Fernand. "I think perhaps it would be better for us not. Last night I went to consult with Ona."

"Who is Ona?"

"The wise woman who lives on the reef. All the people here go to her if the fishing is bad, or if they are sick or if they wish to know the future. It took me all night to reach her and get back, for Ona lives far away. I gave her my pearl to get her help against Yakoff, but she would not take it, she gave me it back—all the same she gave me advice."

He took the little box from his pocket and opening it, showed the pearl in its nest of wool, as if he wished it to be a witness and a corroboration of his statement.

"She said to me, let this thing to itself. Do not interfere with Yakoff and the other. Leave them to the Dark People who have prepared a path for

them with a pit at its end, so that they may fall in and be lost."

"But," said June, "he *ought* to be told so that he may fight this thing."

"How?" asked Fernand. "Yes. I felt as you feel when, this morning, I came to your ship to give you warning, but during the day I have been thinking of Ona's words, and I am pulled this way and that, till now I feel that she spoke the truth. It is sometimes better to run before the storm than to try and paddle against it—there is a God who hates the wicked."

June said nothing for a moment. She was deep in thought.

How could she speak of this thing to Cyrus. How could she say to him: "There are two men here who are going to attack you for something you did years ago, and try and get money out of you on account of it."

Put in any other way it would have been just as bad. "Did you kill a man years ago? Do you know anything of a man called Yakoff?" No, it was impossible, at least impossible without wounding herself as much as Cyrus—and besides what would be the use?

Cyrus couldn't kill Yakoff and Chales, and killing, alone, would stop their mouths.

If there was truth in this story of Yakoff's, one course of action alone seemed open to Cyrus. Effacement. He would have to disappear from San Francisco, drop everything, become another man with another name. For if the story were true and the Law could be evoked, she saw quite clearly that these men would destroy Cyrus.

June had received a good education at the Pinkerton Academy at Monterey. But the best and cheapest education you can give any person is to teach them

to read, and besides the academic subjects taught at the Pinkerton Academy she had, by reading picked up a good deal of knowledge of the world.

The vast San Francisco daily and Sunday newspapers had told her a lot about life, enough, anyhow to make her aware of the true facts of this position.

"I'll think of what is to be done," said she. "You may be right, but all the same, it is impossible to sit and do nothing."

"If you will let me," said Fernand, "I will keep watch on these men—— Stay—an idea has come to me. Why not—why not——!"

"Yes?" said June, wondering what he meant.

"Make them fight," said he, a dark flash coming into his face and a light that June had never seen before in his eyes.

"Yakoff insulted me," he went on, "the very day your ship came into the lagoon. I will make him fight. It shall be man to man and I will kill him because I am the better man. Chales I will also make fight; him, too, will I kill, in fair fight—but I must get them separate and alone."

It was the Spaniard speaking.

The fiery spirit that inspired the Conquistadores the desperate indifference to life that one still may find even beneath the orange trees of Seville.

"At all events," said he, "leave me to fight this thing. Do nothing till you hear from me."

CHAPTER XVIII

ON BOARD

THEY came back along the coral, scarcely speaking a word. The yacht lying out on the blue water

showed the dinghy streamed astern on a line, but June had forgotten that it was waiting there to be rowed off for her. The old derelict canoe that they had salved yesterday was lying in the beach, and Fernand getting it afloat, she stepped in and they paddled for the yacht.

Cyrus was leaning on the rail smoking a cigar and watching them as they drew near. As they pulled along the landing stage and June stepped from the canoe on to the gratings, they felt his eyes on them.

They could say nothing to each other without being overheard, and the canoe pushed off, the girl turning for a momentary glance at it. Then she came up the companion way.

Cyrus had left the rail and walked aft, taking a chair under the awning. Not a word to her.

Was he angry with her? What had happened? She came and sat down close to him.

"So you're back," said he.

"Yes, I'm back," she replied. "I went to look at the reef pools."

He flung away his cigar stump and proceeded to light another cigar. Then he picked up a magazine he had been reading and engaged himself with it.

The girl noticed the curious fact that he was reading it upside down. Then she rose and went below.

Cyrus was angry with her.

As a matter of fact, he was.

June had become to him not only a daughter, but a chum, a necessity, a possession that possessed him.

The thought of a man taking her away from him had troubled him at times, but never much. She wasn't the marrying sort, so he fancied, anyhow, he knew her opinion of the young society men she had

come in contact with, and her predilection for the men who did things with their hands as well as their heads. She was a "sensible girl"—as though sense had anything to do with the heart. If at some future date she ever did marry, it would be with some serious and sensible man, wealthy, of course, and of good repute, and it would be a long time hence when he, Cyrus, would be older and caring less for things, and maybe she would have children, and he would be a grandfather to them—and they would all live together.

In this manner he had doped himself when the thought of June and marriage came together in his mind. No particular man had ever given him much uneasiness, young Wannamaker had shown her attention, but there was nothing in it, and an Englishman named Cassell had proposed to her and been turned down. June had told him of the business. "I'm not going to ever marry anyone," she said, "I want to be free," and he believed her.

Well, all of a sudden into his life had come disturbance.

Just as an animal scents danger, or sees fate in the form of a distant hunter, so of a sudden yesterday, and without any very apparent reason, he had taken fright.

The thing was absolutely preposterous. Yet something in her manner, something in the way she spoke of Fernand—this scamp who had taken her into danger—something perhaps telepathic had turned him against the very name of this man.

And to-day, awakening from his siesta he had found her gone ashore, and she had come back with Fernand!

"Been to see the reef pools with him." And she

had never said she was going ashore for such a purpose. She must have arranged it yesterday—and not said a word!

Cyrus, with the real truth of the situation hidden from him, had some cause to grumble.

On top of everything else, there was the personal appearance of Fernand. There was no denying that the chap was good-looking. One of those good-looking scamps that women run after. He ought to have been a film star.

He was a "boat-man," worse, a canoe man, fished for his living; why, great Scot!—the idea that there might perchance be anything between him and June made Cyrus drop his magazine.

What would San Francisco say? "Cy Hardanger's girl has gone and married a kanaka boatman." That is what 'Frisco would say. What Milligan and White and Delmage and the rest at the Club would say.

However, there was no use in his losing his hair prematurely, there might be absolutely nothing in it, and calling the steward for a cocktail he took his magazine and began reading it, this time right side up.

Dinner passed off that evening as if nothing had happened. June was strung up, she talked and chatted with the surface of her mind whilst deep down her subconscious and semi-subconscious self was brooding on the events that might be taking place on shore.

Had she done wrong in not trying to stop Fernand in his design to fight these two men, these two evil creatures, worse than any beasts, but still men. Suppose now, Fernand were to kill two tigers that threatened Cyrus, would that be wrong? No. Yet these men were worse than tigers, and he was going

to use fair play and give each a fighting chance, wa
that wrong? No—and yet—and yet—so strong i
the effect on the civilized mind of the sophistry that
bred of the Law, differentiates between crimes tha
in the sight of God must be equal, she felt a doubt

These men were not out to kill Cyrus but to ro
him.

Death was being loosed on them because they wer
robbers, blackmailers—death! Well, were they no
merciless, were they not indeed threatening Cyru
with what was as bad as death? So she argued wit
herself whilst talking to the other about indifferen
matters.

Curiously, she never said to herself: "What
they kill Fernand?" So absolute was her confidenc
in the power and personality of the man she loved
that fear for his safety did not trouble her. He wa
the sea eagle pursuing the fish. The hawk pursuin
the carrion crow.

After dinner they passed to the deck-house smoking
room where coffee was served.

When they were alone, Cyrus who had been holdin
himself back all dinner-time, turned to June.

"Say," said he, "I didn't know you were goin
on the reef this afternoon. Woke up and found yo
gone. Did that young chap ask you to go wit
him?"

"Yes."

"Asked you yesterday?"

"No, this morning."

"But he wasn't here this morning."

"Yes, he was, before you were up. I was o
deck and he came along in his canoe and asked me.

Cyrus boiled inwardly.

"I think you might have told me."

June did not reply. How could she? How could she say: "He asked me to go because he wanted to tell me about two men who are threatening you." To tell that would be to reveal everything, and this business was now Fernand's, she had acquiesced in his determination, he was risking all, and she had no right to tell anyone, not even Cyrus.

"I want to be straight with you," said Cyrus. "You know I never bother how you come and go, but seems to me, seems to me——"

"Yes?"

"Seems to me—well, not to put too fine a point on it, this young chap would be better attending to his fishing than coming round the yacht like this."

"Like what?"

"Like this—taking you off and risking your life. You and he were all day yesterday together, and you come back praising him up. See here, June, you're young and I'm old and I've seen a lot of the world—and men are men and women are women, and I've been worried lest you'd suddenly taken a liking for this boy. There, it's out."

"I have," said June.

Cyrus got up, then he sat down with his hands on his knees, gave a laugh and turning sideways in his easy chair, sought in his pocket for the little cigar cutter he always carried. He chose a cigar from the box at his elbow and lit it and blew a cloud of smoke.

"June," said he, "if you mean what you say, this is pure craziness."

"How?"

"Oh, how! You know very well that I've never

worried about you, given you a free hand, trustin to your sense and you've never disappointe me."

"And how have I disappointed you now?" aske she.

"How! Well, look at him"

"Who?"

"This chap."

"Yes."

"He's harpooned you. You admit it, and I sa again, look at him, a common boatman."

"He is not common and he is not a boatman, said June, "and he hasn't harpooned me. He is man different from any other man I have ever me You needn't go on like that. Dad, I'm going to tal and you've got to listen. Only it's you, I'd sa you'd insulted me by talking about my being ha pooned. I have eyes, and, I hope, sense. Fernan is not a modern man, he is a being who has grown u outside the world of men here where there is little el than sea. He is simple and straight, primitive an honest. I've heard you say yourself that one grai of honesty was worth a ton of cleverness."

"I was talking of politicians."

"No matter, it's true of all men. There is nothin else to a man in my opinion——"

"But heavens above!" broke in Cyrus, "you' only known this fellow a few hours—this is yo impression, but what do you really know abo him?"

"I know that he is capable of risking his life t save another man from injury."

"He told you that?"

"Never mind. I know it."

Cyrus smoked for a moment in silence. Then h

said: "I stand to you in the place of father and mother. I have a right to interfere all I can if I see things shaping against your future interests and happiness. Unless you get a clutch on this, you will be carried away. A momentary infatuation may damn a whole life. Granted that this man may be everything you say, you have known him only a few hours. Leaving that aside, the whole position is monstrous. He is not of our class. I reckon I'm no snob, but there's no getting away from class. I'd be a fool and a fathead and unfaithful to the trust your mother placed in me, if I did not put my foot down now, definitely. I will never consent to this folly."

June rose up, paused for a moment as if about to speak, and then, without a word, left the smoke-room and went below to her own cabin.

It was their first semblance of a quarrel. Cyrus, left to himself, sat with a frown on his forehead, deep in meditation.

It had to be done. This insanity had to be met and fought. She would get over it in time and better to hurt her now than to let her injure herself beyond recovery. That canoe man! That confounded reef-scraping scallywag! Was there ever such a complication?

A knock came to the door and a quartermaster entered.

"If you please, sir, there's a man come on board by name of Yakoff. He says it's by appointment about some pearls."

Cyrus remembered the pearl man. He hesitated a moment, half disinclined to be bothered by the matter. Then he said:

"Show him in."

CHAPTER XIX

THE WATCHER ON THE BEACH

WHEN Fernand left June that evening and reached the shore, he turned to his house, went in and lay down on his bed to think. He had not slept the night before, he was tired and the business before him lay like a mountain to be climbed.

Would he have undertaken this business which meant a fight to the death between himself and two men, if Yakoff had not flung that insult at him the other day? Leaving aside the hatred he had for Yakoff and Chales on account of their threatened attack on Cyrus, he hated Yakoff personally.

We have all our weak spots, and the weak spot, or shall we call it the red spot, in the character of Fernand now was a fine full-blown Spanish capacity to hate another man to the knifing point. I have said full-blown. A week ago it was not in the bud. The insult when Yakoff had said to him, "You damned kanaka," had brought it to bud. The threat to the woman he loved and her father had brought it to blossom.

He lay on his bed now thinking.

He would get Yakoff by himself to-night on the reef, get him on some pretext away to a flat of coral that lay beyond the canoe beach, and there make him fight it out. Two shark knives lay in the locker by his door, he would give Yakoff one and take the other himself.

If he was the winner, the tide would take Yakoff's body away; if he was the loser, Yakoff would spit on him and proceed to the ruin of Cyrus and the girl.

But he would not be the loser.

Now as to Chales; was it necessary to treat Chales in the same fashion? It was here that now calmly, thinking of the matter, his mind drew slightly back.

Chales knew a good deal but he did not know the absolutely essential facts that would enable him to attack Cyrus. Yakoff out of the way, Chales would be a poor fish.

He was chiefly dangerous to Yakoff. If Yakoff were to squeeze Cyrus for money, Chales would be sure to squeeze Yakoff.

No. Chales, once the other was out of the way, might be disregarded, he felt sure of that, and glad of it. Loathing the creature he still had no desire to kill him.

At this point in his meditations he fell asleep, sleeping for several hours and awaking to find that it was night and the moon above the reef. He took the knives from the locker and placing one in each pocket of the flannel coat he was wearing, came out, closing the door behind him.

The village was still awake, and the *California* out on the lagoon lay with her anchor and port lights making amber dribbles on the water.

A guitar sounded from somewhere in the village and a light wind stirred the palm leaves—a warm wind, sea-scented and caressing as the breath of a woman on the cheek of her lover. Fernand was turning to the left to make for the house of Yakoff when his eye was caught by a canoe putting off. There were two men in her and she was heading for the *California*.

Now, what canoe could that be putting out at this hour for the yacht?

Had Yakoff decided to do the business to-night?

He remembered the plan he had heard Yako unfolding to Chales. They were to go together an whilst Yakoff went on board to do his business Chales was to hang on in the canoe as a support an witness in case Cyrus should turn dangerous.

He watched the canoe come to the side of the yacht Then, turning, he ran to the house of Yakoff. Ther was no one there.

Yes. The business was on hand to-night, he wa too late to stop them threatening Cyrus. There wa nothing to be done but wait till their return, an for this purpose he came to the last house in th village and lay down in its shadow, his eyes fixed o the *California*, where at that moment Yakoff wa being shown into the smoke-room.

CHAPTER XX

THE ATTACK ON CYRUS

Cyrus did not rise at the sight of the pearl mar

"Well," said he, "you've come back; thought yo would, yesterday. Got the pearls?"

"Yes, Captain," said Yakoff, "I have got the pearls and I have thought better of the price I asked you.

"Let's see them again," said Cyrus.

Yakoff produced the box and Cyrus took it an opened it.

"Beautiful, aren't they, Captain?"

"You needn't call me Captain. I'm the owner Well, Mr. What's-your-name, they're not bad pearls but two thousand is all I can offer. I told you s and I haven't changed my figure."

"But I have," said Yakoff.

"I beg your pardon," said Cyrus. "What are you getting at?"

"I couldn't take two thousand for those pearls."

Cyrus looked at the other. Was he mad? No, he did not seem mad. Yakoff, standing with the lamplight on his fat greasy face, did not look mad, he looked evil. He was smiling.

"I couldn't take fifty thousand or a hundred thousand dollars for those pearls. No, Captain—I beg your pardon—Mr.—I couldn't take less than half a million dollars and they're cheap at that."

A cold wind, ghostly, almost imperceptible, seemed suddenly to blow upon the mind of Cyrus.

He did not know Yakoff, could not remember ever having seen the man before, but this talk which was evidently not the talk of madness had about it something personal to himself, that was the first fleeting impression followed by the recognition of the fact that Yakoff was *asking* him for half a million dollars.

Cyrus put the cotton-wool in its place and handed the box back to the other.

"Bunk!" said he, indicating the smoke-room door with his thumb. "Get off the ship before you're kicked."

Yakoff put the box in his pocket and turned to the door.

"Very well, Brown," said he. "Kicked! That's how you talk to a gentleman. Kicked—well, we will see. We will see—we will see who will do the kicking. You wait Mr. Brown."

The name "Brown" was Yakoff's test. It all depended how Cyrus took it.

"Stand there!" cried Cyrus.

The smoke-room of the *California* possessed a stand

of rifles, six Winchesters, most useful even in thes days, especially should one visit the Melanesia islands that were in the *California's* itinerary. Cyrus at the name "Brown," had spread his chest wide; a Yakoff finished, Cyrus wheeled, seized a rifle, an levelled it at the chest of the pearl merchant—t hold him from moving from the room.

Yakoff laughed.

It was now that his wisdom in having secure Chales as a partner in this business showed itself.

"No," he said, "I am not Leeson, to be shot lik a dog over a deal of cards. I'm Yakoff Abrahamo vitch, a man who goes cautious and never gives himsel away. My partner is outside in a canoe. At the soun of that gun he'd give the alarm to the French authori ties, then you'd be hanged for me as well as Leeson.'

Cyrus laid the rifle on the table.

"Come away from that door," said he. "Sit down Who are you?"

"I am Yakoff Abrahamovitch, the friend o Goldberg and Leeson, and was with them at Por Denison, twenty-one years ago.

"Goldberg went north and you were partner witl Leeson, had been for years, gun-running and such You had lost all your money, but he had not lost his You remember a young chap that used to do th cooking, that was me. It's a long time ago Cy Brown and I have changed since then, but m memory has not changed. Nor you. Look at you finger; look at your face.

"You were staying at the Black Farm, some mile from the town. I had gone to the town for a jam boree. I came back to find Leeson dead. He wa lying on the floor in the sitting-room, his pistol i his hand. It hadn't been fired, a bullet was throug

his heart and your pistol was on the floor with one chamber discharged, and by the way Leeson fell it was clear how he'd been shot. And there was no signs of Brown. Right inland we followed his pugs, but he'd got clear away—and the reward of five hundred pounds was out against him; five hundred pounds, dead or alive."

"Finished?" asked Cyrus. "Well, if you have, allow me to tell you that the killing of Leeson was an act of self-defence. As you say, Brown had lost all his money. Yes, but that night he sat down to écarté with Leeson and won all Leeson's; pretty near two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount. Then Leeson tried to shoot him. Would have done so, only his revolver missed fire, that gave Brown time to whip out his, only just time; if he hadn't fired, Leeson would have drilled him. When you say Leeson's pistol hadn't been fired you are a damn liar. It had been fired, but it hadn't gone off. The police are experts at that sort of thing and they would have examined his pistol and found the truth.

"Then again there was no money taken."

"How do you mean?" asked Yakoff.

"I mean that Brown left the place. He was no killer. He was pretty well bowled over to see a man lie dead to his hand, and he'd been drinking and his nerve wasn't what it might have been. He left the place and left the country, for next morning, when he saw things clear, he saw too late he'd been a fool not to stick it out. But as I was saying, he could have proved his story and he can prove it still."

"In what way?" asked Yakoff.

"This way. There was no money taken. He left that house just as it was, with the fellow lying dead on the floor and the cards and money on the table.

"The money was stacked on the table by his chair. He was dead broke that night as he could and can prove, so he must have won the money from Leeson. Any quarrel must have come from Leeson, see. A man doesn't shoot a man because he has won money from him."

"You're talking wild," said Yakoff. "There was no money on the table, or cards. When I got there after daybreak, Leeson was lying done in, your pistol was on the floor, and Leeson's strong box was open with his keys in the lock. He'd been killed for his keys and his money."

Yakoff took a cigar from the box on the table, bit it, and lit it and blew a cloud of smoke. The act was scarcely noticed by Cyrus.

He saw now the pit into which he had fallen. He recalled again that terrible night. Horrified by what had happened, shaken with alcohol, he had left cards, money, dead man and everything, in his sudden flight from the scene. Yakoff must have come and instantly made his profit, taken the money, put the cards away, taken the dead man's keys, opened the safe, left it open. Then he would have gone for the police, with absolute safety to himself.

Brown had killed Leeson for his money, the fool had actually left his pistol behind with one chamber discharged.

Murderers are often accused of doing very stupid things that lead to their arrest. They do these stupid things, not because they are more stupid than other men, but because their minds are upset by the act they are committing or have committed.

Brown was not a murderer, all the same his mind had been turned topsy-turvy by the stress of this business, helped, of course by alcohol. It was not

till several hours later that he discovered the loss of the pistol, the fact that he hadn't put it back in his pocket and that it must be lying there as evidence against him.

It was then too late to go back.

Cyrus recalled all this. He saw the whole thing en bloc, just as a drowning man sees his life. He saw also that if Yakoff moved against him, there was no escape.

Once the Law took the matter in hand it would probe back through his past. It would establish the fact that he was really Brown who had changed his name to Cyrus Hardanger, and it could do this quite easily for he could not account for his movements over twenty years ago without disclosing the fact that he was Brown.

He had always felt safe up to this. The time was so long ago, the scene so far away there in Australia, and in those days he had been a man of no account; also he was innocent of murder and sure in his mind, if he were ever held for this thing that he could prove his innocence.

But Yakoff had upset all that. Cyrus had reckoned without this man of supreme wickedness. This man who already had profited to the extent of two thousand five hundred pounds, and was out now for a fortune of half a million dollars.

For a moment the impulse to throttle the reptile there and then, regardless of the confederate waiting outside in the canoe, seized Cyrus like an insanity. Then he conquered it.

He said to Yakoff:

"You stole that money and fixed up things so that it looked as if I had killed that guy for his coin."

"That for a tale!" said Yakoff. "I'm telling you when I got there I found the safe bust, the man dead and you gone. I'm not a hard man and I've no grudge against you, see, but it's this way. I'm in the know of this thing—see—I'm so to speak an accomplice after the fact if I don't tell, see, and I'm a poor man. I'm clean putting myself in a hole if I keep my mouth shut, knowing what I do. See all that? Well, there you are—I'm not going to do you a service for nothing. You're a rich man, this boat of yours is your credentials. I'm not asking how you made your pile, it's there. I'm putting my services to you at half. I'm taking a big risk, holding my tongue knowing what I know. See here. I was talking of half. Well now, see here. I'm no squeezer. This is a business deal and two hundred thousand dollars down will close it. You'll never hear another word of the matter. But that's my ultimatum."

Cyrus who had been standing all the time, took a seat.

"Two hundred thousand dollars," said he as though he were talking to himself.

"That's the amount," said Yakoff, "and the pearls are thrown in."

There was a tantalus case and a syphon on a table near the door and Yakoff looked at them.

"If it's all the same to you," said he, "it's thirsty weather."

"Help yourself," said Cyrus.

He sat with his finger-tips together like a man engaged in figuring out something.

One of the worst positions in the world is stalemate. You are a prisoner yet not a prisoner. There is no move open to you but surrender.

Cyrus was held not only by the bare facts we know

but by the extra fact that leaving everything else aside, the raking up of his past would bring all sorts of minor things to light. He had been a free lance in a doubtful commercial world, he had told June about the gun-running long ago, but he had no wish to tell the world. He knew quite well that if his affairs were raked into, there would be enough to make a scandal. He was no worse in this respect than half-a-dozen of the other San Francisco rich men, and he had always been good to the poor and never underpaid an employee. That would make no difference. He would fall socially and June would suffer.

That was the least that might eventuate from this business. The worst was hanging or life.

An extradition order, a trial and Yakoff's evidence. That was all that was wanted.

He awoke from his reverie.

"I've got to think on the whole of this matter," said he. "You must come again in the morning, it's too big to decide on to-night."

"As you please," said Yakoff.

He saw that he had won, but he showed no sign of triumph. As a matter of fact he was exhausted, the nerve tension of the business had been tremendous. There had been the chance of Cyrus going fantee and killing him out of hand, despite Chales being alongside in the canoe; there was the huge sum he was gambling for and there was the excitement of holding another man so to speak at the pistol point.

He had not taken the whisky out of bravado or from impudence but from necessity.

He put down the glass and prepared to go.

"At what time shall I come?" he asked.

"Make it eleven o'clock," replied Cyrus.

Then without another word he accompanied him

outside, saw him go down the companionway where the canoe was waiting, and push off.

The night was perfect and the moon ripple of the canoe showed broad in its track. Lights showed on the shore and the wind brought the far-off tanging of a guitar from the native houses. The sound of the sea on the reef came like the breathing of the ocean in its sleep.

Cyrus turned back to the smoking-room.

An hour ago he had been a free man, careless, happy and with years of happiness before him. That was all gone.

Well he knew that if he paid Yakoff this money it would not be the end of the business.

The leech would attack him again. He was hopelessly involved, tied up.

Ten dollars paid to Yakoff in hard money would be as bad as two hundred thousand. Even if Yakoff were to hold his hand, he would always be in fear. Never easy.

There was only one way out.

Milligan and Harper of San Francisco held his will, leaving everything to June. That was all right. Yakoff would come on board in the morning at eleven o'clock. Yakoff would be paid.

No, that would not do. Nothing must take place on board the yacht, on account of June. He would go ashore with Yakoff to his house to make the payment there.

He opened a drawer in the bureau near the door and took out a heavy Navy revolver, opened the breech, took out the cartridges and replaced them. Then he put the thing back.

Then he rang for the steward and told him to ask June to come to the smoke-room.

CHAPTER XXI

A MOMENT'S CHAT

ALONE, and waiting for the coming of the girl, Cyrus's mind suddenly changed.

It was as though a mist charged with electricity had split, giving him for a moment a clear view of the world, himself and his position.

No. He couldn't kill Yakoff and then commit suicide. A moment ago the plan was clear in his head even to the vision of Yakoff being held before the pistol point, shuddering, white, gibbering with terror, suffering agonies of mind before the pull of the trigger sent him to hell.

That vision, begotten of fury and the desire for revenge, had vanished.

Cyrus was not a killer, and the easy years had sapped his daring and the vital energy which finds its expression in recklessness.

No. He could not kill his tormentor and then commit suicide. There was another way out of the whole business—social extinction.

To disappear again, as he had disappeared after the killing of Leeson, only this time with money and to spare tucked away and with June for a companion.

Was it possible? Quite, if he carefully made his plans, and if June acquiesced.

He was thinking this when the door opened and the girl came in; she had not retired when the steward gave her the message and she was in the same dress in which she had dined. When the message came to her that Cyrus wanted to see her, she could not

imagine what it could be. They had parted almost in anger over the business of Fernand. Could it be possible that Cyrus was on it still—wanted to chew the rag?

She was quite prepared for battle, but the sight of him as she came into the room calmed her mind.

Cyrus was standing sideways to her with his hand on the bureau top, looking down at a paper opened on the flap; he looked tired and as he turned to her she noticed that he was somehow changed.

"Sit down, June," said he. "I've sent for you to have a moment's chat. I've got to tell you something I have always held back. Sit down—sit down. No, I'm all right and if I look a bit shaken up it's only from thinking and worrying over a business that comes up to me now and then from the past.

"After all it's only my own affair. I never told your mother. There are things in a man's life that can't very well be told and are better left covered. Well, it's short work to tell what this thing was—just a man killed.

"I killed a man once, it was in my own defence, but the circumstances would be read against me. Things happen like that."

He stopped and looked at the girl and was surprised at her calmness.

"You understand me," said he. "Away, years ago it was. I shot him over the card table because he'd already drawn a six gun on me—the thing misfired and before he could raise the hammer again, I'd drilled him. If I hadn't, he'd have drilled me. You see, I'd won all his money and he wanted it back."

June sighed deeply. It was as though a weight had been taken off her shoulders.

Cyrus was innocent of murder. Yakoff's threat against him would lose its power.

But why had Cyrus sent for her to tell her this? She knew nothing of Yakoff's visit. The answer came on the heels of the thought.

"I sent for you to tell you this," said Cyrus, "because there is a man here on this atoll who has recognised me, and who has threatened me. He threatened to give information about that old happening if I don't hand him over two hundred thousand dollars as hush money. His name is——"

"Yakoff," she replied.

Cyrus drew back sharply, as though someone had struck at him.

"Good God!" said he, "who told you that? How did you know anything of this business? How——"

"Dad," said she, "I've known it since this afternoon."

"And who told you?"

"Fernand."

"That young chap?"

"Yes, the man we nearly fought over an hour or so ago."

"But—Great Scott! How did *he* know?"

"He overheard Yakoff telling a man named Chales, he overheard the whole thing. That was yesterday. To-day early and before you were up he saw me on deck and took a canoe off. He wanted to tell me the whole business and that is why he asked me to come in the afternoon on to the reef. You accused me a little while ago of making an appointment to go on the reef with Fernand without telling you. Well, that was why I made it."

"But why couldn't he come and tell me?"

"Dad, think! He has never spoken to you, he doesn't know you. How would you like to go to a dead stranger and break the news that someone was going to attack him for something done in his past? But Fernand knows me and he told me all. He was in great distress of mind.

"You don't know him and you can scarcely imagine him. He is so primitive and so innocent, and so free from any double motive that anything like this hits him hard. It isn't only that he cares for me, if you were an absolute stranger—that is to say, if he didn't care for me—he would still be out to try and stop Yakoff."

Cyrus was silent for a moment. Here was a new complexity. This scamp of a Fernand as a defender! Could Irony rise higher than that? Only a couple of hours ago he had been telling June that Fernand was not good enough for her, that Fernand was socially below them and all that time she must have known that he, Cyrus, was a man outside the Law and that Fernand was trying to help him.

A momentary irritation threw him off his balance.

"But how can the chap do anything?" he asked. "How on earth can he help. I sent for you because I wanted to put before you the position of things and tell you what is in my mind. The only thing for me to do is to dive under, quit everything, change my name——"

"But why?" cut in June. "Why not stand up to him and fight? You are innocent."

"Because, little girl," said Cyrus, "Yakoff has fixed things so that, though I am innocent, my best friend, if he knew the facts as Yakoff has fixed them, would say that I was guilty. He came into the room

where I had left that man dead, boned the money I had left on the table and made it appear that I had killed the chap for his money and done a bunk. He didn't do this out of simple devilishness, but for profit. He nailed two thousand five hundred pounds and threw the blame on me."

"And now," said June, "he wants to repeat the business."

"That is so."

"Well," said the girl, "I believe there is a Providence."

"There seems to be for chaps like Yakoff."

"No, for people like us."

Cyrus was silent. He was pouring himself out some soda water.

"There's one thing, thank God," said he, "your poor mother has been saved this trouble. Well, well, who knows, it may be all for the best, though it's hard to see it."

"If you can't stand up to him and fight," said June, "perhaps something will happen to help. You asked me what Fernand could do. Perhaps he can do a lot. Perhaps he can do a lot—it's this way. First of all, Yakoff insulted him the day we came in here, then again, Yakoff has nearly killed his diving partner by selling him opium, then again there is this vile attack on you and again there is the fact that Fernand cares for me.

"Fernand told me he was going to make Yakoff fight a fair fight with equal weapons."

"A duel."

"Yes."

"To kill. Why did you not tell me all this before?"

"Because," said June, "it was not mine to tell.

I should not have told you now, but I could not help doing so, my mind is so upset—and you had to know the truth about Fernand."

Cyrus stood looking at the girl without a word. This amazing business had been sprung on him only a couple of hours ago, yet for several days it had been brewing. Unknown to him people had been plotting and counter-plotting, plotting to destroy him and plotting to save him.

Here in this outlandish place where, above all places in the world, one might fancy oneself disregarded and unknown, his fate had been decided—was being decided, perhaps at this very minute, out there in the moonlit night that was sending its sounds and sea-scouts through the open portholes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FATE OF CHALES

When Yakoff left the smoke-room, so sure was he of success that he could feel the two hundred thousand dollars in his pocket. Yakoff knew men. In that interview he had summed Cyrus up.

Cyrus was just an ordinary individual, there was no danger in him, it was perfectly unnecessary to have brought Chales as a backer and stand-by.

As Yakoff came down the companionway to the canoe, this fact hit him hard.

If he had only had the courage to come alone on this business all the profit would have been his, now that he had Chales tacked on to him, he would have to share. Not only that, Chales, once he had spent his money, would be sure to want more.

This was a nuisance.

He stepped into the waiting canoe and they pushed off, Chales working the paddle and asking no questions.

Only when they reached the beach did he speak.

"Well," he said, "what luck?"

"I'll tell you up at the house," said Yakoff. "No use talking here. Haul her up a bit higher—there, that will do. Come along."

He led the way, passing the house in whose shadow Fernand was lying watching them, and on through the houses of the village, unconscious that Fernand was following.

Arrived at his own house he led the way in, shut the door and lit the kerosene lamp in the living-room.

Then he fetched a bottle of gin from the case in the corner, pulled the cork and poured himself out a tot.

"Have a drink," said he.

"I've told you onst and I've told you for good, I'm off the stuff till this thing is pulled through," replied the drunkard. "Come, don't be up to any of your funny tricks, have you touched the chap or haven't you?"

Yakoff put the glass down and took a seat; the other followed suit.

"Touched him," said Yakoff, "the way you talk! As if he was the Bank of California and me going in with a cheque to be cashed. I've given him his ultimatum, and he's to see me in the morning, that's as far as I've got."

"Then, if you've got that far," said Chales, "the thing is done. If there'd been any kick in him he'd have bottled you right away and sent ashore for the French authorities. The thing's done."

"Is it?" said Yakoff. "I'm not so sure of that—and now before I go an inch further, Billy Chales, I want things straightened out with you. Half shares, you said."

"Half shares and not a dollar under."

"Well, it's not worth it. I've figured it out. From what I've seen of that chap I'm taking a big risk. I tell you I've got cold feet. How do I know if I tackle him again to-morrow morning he won't bottle me, as you said, and call in the Frenchman? No, if it's half shares you want I'm off. Five thousand dollars I'm not saying—and then I'd want a paper from you acknowledging receipt so's you wouldn't be playing any games with me after. If that won't do you, I'm through with this business."

"But I'm not," said Chales. "I'm not going to lose making money through any of your damn foolishness, you've got to go on with this business, you've started running and you've got to run, see? If you don't, I'll split. I'll go to this chap myself——"

"You've got no hold on him, there's nothing you can say or do against him—it's me that's——"

"You shut up. It's you I've got the hold on. I'll tell him your game, that's all, I'll turn evidence that you come seducin' me to help squeeze him; with me at his elbow and that story, where'll you be? Yes, you did, you blighter, comin' seducin' me with a promise of half shares and then turning your back on your promise——"

"There you go," cut in Yakoff, "running away with things. I've got all the risk, haven't I—well, there's no use arguing. I've got to swallow it——"

"You bet you have."

"And having swallowed it, it's done with."

He rose and came towards the door, Chales following him.

They both came out.

The village now was wrapped in sleep and the moon held the night.

The *California*, lying out on the lagoon, showed the deck-house still alight and several ports like amber eyes that seemed to watch the reef. The wind had almost died away.

"Come," said Yakoff, "I'll walk a bit of the way to your place." He closed the house door. They started off and Fernand, who had been crouching by the rubbish heap that lay by the eastern wall of the house, came from his hiding-place.

Clad as he was in white, he would not be easily seen standing close against the coral lime-washed wall of the house.

But the two did not look back, they went on their way and Fernand, holding back till they were nearly level with the canoe beach, cautiously followed.

They were going in the direction of Chales's house, evidently having a last word together on the business of the morrow.

Having seen Chales home, Yakoff would return.

He would meet Yakoff, get him in conversation, induce him to walk to the big flat of coral, beyond the last of the trees and straddling the outer beach. Then he would make him fight.

It was a curious psychological fact that what was uppermost in his mind now was not the safety of the woman he loved and her father, but his hatred of Yakoff as Yakoff, his desire to wipe out that insult.

"You dam' kanaka."

The words rose in him now transmuting themselves into blind fury and the lust to kill.

Yakoff should not have said those words to a Spaniard. Yakoff having said them had forgotten them. Just as a man might forget a seed he has planted in the ground.

They had been growing in the mind of Fernand and what had brought them to a sudden and furious blossom was his passion for June.

"You dam' kanaka."

It was like a knife in his newly awakened pride of manhood.

Truly, as Ona had said, the Dark People were concerning themselves with the affairs of Yakoff. Hatred was following him in the form of Fernand but there were others on the reef that night besides Fernand.

Near Chales's shack, Yakoff paused, he made a movement with his arms as if pointing out something to the west, and then the two went on. Fernand followed.

He had not reckoned on this. Why had not Chales turned in?

He reached the last of the trees and paused beside a palm watching the figures that had now crossed the flat of coral and were negotiating the rough coral that ran down to where the breakers of the outer sea were bursting in spray beneath the moon.

Here were great reef pools just uncovered by the ebbing tide, and showing like mirrors in the silvery light.

Chales was slightly in front of his companion suddenly he fell, as if tripped up from behind, and as suddenly fell Yakoff on top of him.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEMON OF THE POOL

YAKOFF, standing above the body of the man he had tripped and strangled, drew his sleeve across his forehead.

Well, that was done, without fuss or bother. That trick he had learned at Hakodate was hard to beat, and the fool had only himself to thank.

Let him split now if he could.

He looked around him. He could not see Fernand because Fernand had cast himself down by the tree under which he had been standing. He could see nothing but the trees and a hint of the village beyond them, the reef, the moonlit sea.

Then, bending, he seized the body of Chales by the heels, and began to drag it across the rough coral to a great reef pool, twenty or thirty yards away to the west.

Around this pool, newly uncovered by the tide, the coral lay fairly flat, and here, near the pool edge, he straightened himself for a moment, wiped his forehead again with his coat-sleeve, and turned to look for some loose rocks to weight the body with.

He saw a man. A man coming towards him across the coral, a man moving swiftly, and as if evoked by the night.

Yakoff's fingers spread open and his flesh crawled on his bones. He turned as if to run, and found himself facing the pool.

The vast, deep pool leading to caverns in the under coral seemed of a sudden to be boiling. He turned to dash along its side when, just as Chales had been tripped, he was tripped and fell.

Something had got a purchase on his right ankle. He knew, and, screaming, he clung to a projection of the coral, whilst the something got a purchase on his knee and left foot.

Fernand saw it all, and everything was wiped from his mind but the sight before him.

He saw in the boiling pool the balloon-like form of the great squid, whose black snake-like tentacles were rushing and rippling over the coral, making a purchase here, seeking one there, preparatory to the great haul on the trapped man.

Without a moment's thought he flung himself on Yakoff to drag him back, an act as mad as the act of a man flinging himself into a furnace to save another.

He had a shark knife in each pocket, but no time to seize or use one. He clung, and as he clung he felt Yakoff's hold torn from the coral as a tooth is torn from a jaw.

He cast himself sideways, he was free. Yakoff's outflung clutching hand had come on the leg of Chales's body, and seized it, just as the great twitch came that carried the murderer clinging to the murdered into the grip of the mechanism now sunk from sight beneath the heaving water.

The pool lipped and coughed and sighed and died to ripples that turned to a mirror reflecting the moon.

CHAPTER XXIV

RELEASE

On board the *California* the clock of the smoke-room pointed to a quarter past three. Cyrus had not retired to rest, neither had the girl.

They had been talking.

This tragedy suddenly sprung on them had brought hem closer together than they ever had been. Never efore had he opened up his life to her, telling her ll sorts of details of his past. His early struggles, he hand to mouth existence he had led, always riven from post to pillar by want of money till the rand coup came, and the phosphates that had saved im and made him.

"And there you are," said he, "all spoiled; not by ay own fault, God knows. Though maybe a bit— I hadn't gone in for gambling I wouldn't have won eeson's money, and he wouldn't have tried to kill he, and I wouldn't have killed him—but I've paid. ord knows I've paid. But what's the use of talking. ife seems all accident s'far as I can see. A man goes long the street and slips on an orange peel and kills imself, or gets smashed in a railway accident through ome railway man's fault—and they talk of a God ooking after things—where is He?"

"Listen," said the girl.

The anchor watch was hailing someone—a voice ame from alongside. Cyrus rose up and went out, nd the girl sat waiting, listening, without a move- ent.

She heard voices. Fernand's voice—and as she ose to her feet, the door opened and Cyrus came in, llowed by Fernand. He was pale, and he looked en years older than when she had seen him last, and, s he stood before her, he had to put his finger-tips n the table to steady himself.

"Those men are gone," said Fernand. "No one ill ever see them again. No. I did not kill them. od did."

He sat down on a chair and Cyrus poured him out

some brandy which he drank neat as though it wer
water. Then he told his story. Told it in a fe
words; everything from the moment when he ha
started to follow the two men, to the moment whe
he had flung himself on Yakoff in a mad attempt t
rescue him.

"You would have done the same," said he, cove
ing his eyes with his hand. "If you had seen—
you had seen."

Cyrus sat for a moment looking at the man wh
brought him the news that he was saved. The ma
who had worked for him and done his best, and wh
would have fought for him, only Providence ha
taken the business into its own supreme hands.

"Son," said he, "I can't talk to you now or mak
you know what I feel—she'll tell you." He rose an
went out leaving them together, and crossing th
deck stood with his hands on the rail looking acros
at the sleeping village, the long, white beach and th
occasional up-flash of foam on the outer coral.

A world of phantasy where no sign of life was o
sound but the never ceasing sound of the breakers;
voice that came to Cyrus as that of the living God wh
slumbers not, nor sleeps.

THE PEARL OF TAHEU

THE PEARL OF TAHEU

CHAPTER I

THE PEARL BUYERS

THE *Araffura* had dropped three or four pearl buyers, half a dozen Chinks, a Yankee showman, and the component parts of a cable switchback at Malii Lagoon. She was now making along board for Taheu, where she would dump Wisemann and Purvis, a Frenchman from the Rue de la Paix in Paris, a Spaniard, four Germans and a Jew; all pearl buyers, with the exception of Purvis and Wisemann.

It was the opening of the pearling season in the Paumotus, and looking down from impossible heights, and with supernatural vision, you would have seen the whole of that vast archipelago lying beneath you from Manhü almost to Gambier; thousands of atolls, big and small, each a pond ringed with coral, and towards the islands to be opened this season the ships of the pearl buyers coming to trade with the natives.

It was after breakfast, and Purvis and Wisemann seated aft, a bit away from the others, were engaged in making up their accounts and settling differences. Purvis, young, yellow-haired, furtive looking, with cigarette-stained fingers; Wisemann twenty years older, heavy, baggy under the eyes, his waistcoat crossed by an oroid gold watch-chain.

They were partners. They had only met three

weeks ago at Papeete, where Purvis, a camera ma who had lost his job at Hollywood, had landed wit a projecting camera for which the police of Lo Angeles had given up the hunt, and with twenty five thousand feet or so of junk film, over the loss o which Moses Boreheim, the junk film dealer, wa still lamenting in far-away California. Bits of ol pictures: *Mutt and Jeff; The Bunco Steerer's Bride A Woman of the Great Wild West; Salome of th Plains*—junk, but good enough for the Islands— according to Wisemann.

The unwritten deed of partnership which boun these two gentlemen together was of great simplicit and had few provisions. Wisemann was supplyin the canvas for the rag-and-stick theatre, and payin the fares to Taheu; Purvis was supplying th pictures, the projector and the expert knowledge Wisemann would keep the door and take the mone in the form of shell or coconuts; Purvis woul grind out the pictures till what time he could in struct some native boy in the business.

Wisemann also brought to the firm local know ledge. This was not his first pearling season. H had been down to Taheu the year before last a owner and manager of a stick-jaw stall, sellin caramels that beat tar for glutinosity, fuzzy-wuzzie pop-corn, chewing-gum, liquorice ropes, and rum conserved tobacco, and working a soda fountai that had literally "gone bust," and nearly brok him; only for a pearl wangled out of a youn kanaka, whose "sweet tooth was bigger'n his wisdo tooth," he'd have lost money on that season's trad

"Well," said Purvis, as he closed up his ratty ol note-book and lit another cigarette, "if there ain' another movie show movin' along to this blesse

old piedish of an atoll of yours we oughta make out six shells a nob or four coconuts; fifty on an average to a house and six houses a day; no rent nor services, only for a chap to work the buzzer when I've learned him. Yes, it oughta pay. The only thing that's rubbin' me under the saddle is the pictures. I've never put the hood on you over the pictures. I was runnin' all the way from Santa Barbara to Papeete beach and had no time to take stock of them. When I did I'd 'a' dumped them in the bay and turned missionary, only I fell in with you. What there is of them ain't bad; it's what there isn't of them gets me. Five minutes of cowboy stuff that's continued with a girl in a Humpmobile bein' chased by a gunman in a roarin' Royce that turns into three hundred foot of Charlie Chaplin with a star in the middle and goes on to Mutt puttin' Jeff in a bar'l of molasses, and not enough of that even—don't make for continooity."

"Don't you bother about that," said Wisemann. "They're movies, ain't they? They're pictures, ain't they? Well, what more do you want; you keep the kanakas starin' whilst I sample their pockets, and don't be botherin' your head about high art and continooity; pearls is our game. Pearls, and we have to fight chaps like that." He pointed to Cohen, the Jew, who had been popping corks in the cabin, and who was now coming on deck wiping his mouth with a red silk handkerchief.

"That's the sort against us, and that's the sort that gets all the pickin's."

"What's their game?" asked Purvis, "and how do they play it?"

"Well, it's this way," said the other. "A chap

like Cohen comes along to an atoll—Taheu for choice—and he goes round and makes his observations and picks out a couple of the best native divers, he doesn't lend them money, for money's not much use in a place like Taheu, but he sells them stuff on credit, dud watches and ten cent gramophones, and silk shirts, and North Pole diamonds, and any d——d thing you can put a name to, bar, maybe, skates. He comes back season after season and gets his diving chaps so tied up in debt that they're his from their souls to their skins, which he doesn't want; but he wants their pearls and he gets them."

"There you are," said Purvis, "that's your tradesman; as I was tellin' you last night, Billy Wisemann, them tradin' chaps has the world skimmed so there's no cream for no one, and least of all for the likes of you and me, and it's a full house to a busted flush that we won't do no good at Taheu with chaps like that around. My idea is to lay low, work the movies for a blind, keep our eyes skinned for chaps like Cohen, and then go for one of them and take his takin's off him."

"I don't want any penitentiary business in mine, thanks," said Wisemann.

Purvis grinned; he was about to reply when the voice of the look-out came, thin as a sea-gull's cry: "Land."

CHAPTER II

JEAN FRANÇOIS CALABASSE

TAHEU showed in the blazing morning: the faintest trace of palm tops on the sea line, now visible from the deck, now washed out by the swell.

Two hours later, with the first of the flood and the wind almost dead astern, the *Araffura* entered the great lagoon, vast and calm as an inland sea, with the northern beach to starboard running away to lose itself in the blue distance; a beach white as salt, hedged by the groves of Jack-fruit and cocoa palms through which showed glimpses of the outer sea. A brig and a schooner lay off the main village, whose thatched roofs marked themselves amidst the trees, and away, like midges on the water of the lagoon, the pearling canoes showed where the divers were at work on the great beds stretching to the west.

Purvis, as he trained a pair of cheap opera-glasses on the crowded beach, kept talking over his shoulder to Billy Wisemann.

"There ain't no picture house that I can see," said Purvis, "but it's a pea-nut gallery public by the sample; there's more children than women, and women than men. Here, take the glasses, whiles I look after the dunnage."

He handed over the glasses as the anchor chain of the *Araffura* raised echoes from the groves; then in the first boat away he was on shore with Wisemann.

No, there was no picture house visible along that extraordinary beach where, on the sands of Romance, and backed by the splendour of sky and sea, the half-civilized mixed with the dregs of civilization, and the Frigate bird flew and the cormorant fished to the shouting of hokey-pokey sellers and the bell of the man who sold fried bananas, or would do so in a few hours, for it was now only noon and the pearling men were out.

Purvis and his companion pushed through the crowd, past the booths whose paraffin flare lamps were

only waiting to insult the stars, right to the wester end of the village where the great trees grew, palm and bread-fruit strangely noble in contrast wit the crew on the beach, and the frowsy old schooner in the anchorage.

Both men were carrying grip sacks, the rest o their stuff would be landed before dark, and the were looking now for a pitch. The picture hous once erected, would serve them for an hotel.

"And here's the place," said Purvis, as they cam to a bay in the groves; "couldn't be better if it wa cut out on purpose. Let's measure him."

They dumped their sacks and Purvis producin a tape measure, they set to work, Purvis kneelin Wisemann walking with the free end of the tape.

So engaged, they did not notice the approach o an old man who had left a little palmetto-thatche house on the west of the clearing, attracted by the voices.

"Fifty-one foot," cried Purvis. "'Nuff and t spare; now then, get round for the side measur ments—— Hallo," he turned his head to whe the old man stood right behind him; "Hello, Po wherever in the hulnation have you blown in from?

"'Scuse me, sar," said the new-comer, who wa on sight a white man, and a Frenchman at tha "my name is Jean François Calabasse. What fo you measuring my property?"

"Your property?" said Purvis.

"Yes, sar, all this, including my abode. Wha for you measure it?"

Purvis looked at Jean François Calabasse, a whi man who had gone native many years ago; looke at his nose coloured by drinking, observed h wandering eye and his clothes, clean and patche

y some native woman. He would have flung ean François Calabasse into the lagoon without ompunction or pity, only that Jean's manner and tatement carried conviction. There was no use tirring up trouble. Purvis became at once all oil. He explained; but Jean shook his head. Purvis aughed. He went to his grip sack and produced bottle. Jean explained that he did not want any hows set up so near his house, then he took a drink. Then he went to his house for three tin cups and a drinking nut, and they all had drinks, and in an hour Jean had leased the site for a permanent free eat and two dollars a week paid in advance.

"But you must tell nothing to my darter about he money," said Jean, as he helped to finish the lask of Sneidmanns kill-you-straight thirty above proof Volendam, warranted over one year old.

Then he collected the tin cups and departed hiccoughing, leaving the surveyors to their work.

CHAPTER III

THE PEARLING FLEET

At noon, when the *Araffura* came bowling in to the lagoon, the pearling fleet had ceased work for a spell, the men and their womenfolk smoking cigarettes, talking, laughing, and shouting remarks from canoe to canoe. Then at the sight of the schooner the fleet fell dumb, cigarettes and bananas were forgotten, and every eye watched critically as she rounded to, with sails spilling the wind and the helm hard a-starboard.

When the rumble-tumble of the anchor chain came across the water, tongues broke out and Jean

Calabasse's "darter" Amama, leaning by her pearlin mate Damea, whistled drearily between her teeth.

Amama could talk like that, and she was sayin to herself and to Damea, who knew quite well wha was passing in her mind: "There's the *Araffura* in she hasn't piled herself on any reef and the storm o last week hasn't hurt her. Cohen is on board an he will want all that pile of shell we have collecte since the season opened a fortnight ago and thos two little pearls." That was the thought i Amama's mind, as in the mind of Damea. Amam was lovely with the beauty of the half-caste—lovel and dark, still almost a child; she had fished fo two seasons now with Damea, the half-cast Spaniard, young as herself, whose father, Jua Lopez, had died of the same disease that was killin Jean François Calabasse. She had known Dame since earliest childhood; they had grown up togethe played together, become inseparable; a communit of two, with Damea the leader and Amama th follower; like brother and sister, yet never quarrel ling, though the temper of Damea was hot as flam and sharp as a sword.

Love had never come near them, yet if Death ha stricken one he would most surely have destroyed th other, so close together were they, so bound togethe in a friendship mysterious as the source of life.

This curious relationship might be expresse vaguely in the statement — they were stil children.

When Damea's father had died, Damea ha inherited the outrigger canoe and the right t fish, the only dowry of his mother, also dead Amama had joined him as fishing partner, an during the last two seasons had kept guard whils

he dived, helped to manage the canoe and clean and stack the shell. Three large pearls they had taken in those seasons, to say nothing of seeds and baroques and shell. They had been extraordinarily lucky, and their take had been a small fortune to Cohen; for Cohen had spotted Damea from the first as a good diver and an innocent, and Cohen had acted according to his lights.

Pearls and shell, all had gone into the possession of Cohen in exchange for boxes of candy and cigars, bead necklaces for Amama, silk shirts—with the result that Damea was in debt—heavily in debt, according to Cohen.

No wonder that the coming of the *Araffura* made Amama whistle dismally between her teeth. Amama had more business sense than Damea—the French have always beaten the Spaniards in practical affairs. It did not want friends and neighbours to tell her that Damea was being done, and she had managed during last off-season to infect Damea with the truth; but there was little use in that in front of the fact that Cohen's bill for goods supplied, forwarded by a B.P. boat before the opening of this season, showed Damea on the wrong side of the fence to the tune of three hundred dollars. Besides feeling that they had been done, Damea and Amama were possessed with the child's natural instinct to evade payment for pleasures enjoyed but forgotten.

"Co-an was to come in this ship," said Damea, speaking in the dialect of Taheu. "He will be waiting for us when we get back."

"Co-an," said Amama. "A, he, Co-an," she drew in her breath and with sparkling eyes was about to give vent to her feelings, when a cry struck her dumb.

"Tarapa, Tarapa—the clam, the clam." Throug the air, straight as a bird from canoe to canoe, a knif huge and heavy like the knife of the cane cutte and sheathed in coconut sennit, went flying till i reached a canoe where a woman was standing u waving her arms. She seized it, unwound th bindings, and dived with it into the water.

Her mate, the first man down after the res interval, had been trapped by a great clam.

The great clam, a bivalve as big as a small batl lies where the bottom is sludgy; tilted almos vertically, its two shells apart, foot or hand intro duced into this terrible mouth causes it to close wit the snap of a gin and the diver is trapped. It i a rare accident at Taheu, but so feared that a heav knife is generally carried—and, more generally forgotten.

Amama, her hand grasping the forward outrigge pole, and Damea with his hand on her shoulde watched till the water broke and the woman re appeared dragging her mate on board their rockin canoe. His left hand was gone and she was grasp ing him by the forearm to stop the bleeding. The watched her binding the arm, casting loose th anchor rope and paddling for shore.

Amama sighed. That was one of the things sh had always dreaded might happen to Damea. Th thought of it brought Cohen suddenly into he mind—Cohen, who ran no risks; Cohen, who too all and gave little; Cohen, who would be waitin for them on the beach when they returned. Bu she said nothing, and Damea having finished cigarette resumed his diving.

Two hours later, and when Damea had knocke off for the day, they set to work to open the catch

No rotting out on the beach was allowed at Taheu, the oysters had to be opened and searched before landing, and only the shells were allowed to be brought ashore, huge shells as big, almost, as soup plates and of the white Tahiti type. Mother-of-pearl shells are found of all weights from a few ounces up to fifteen pounds a pair, and there are three varieties: the white, the golden-edged, and the black-edged. The white is the most valuable, and the price till the last year or so was about the same as it was forty years ago—from £60 to £200 a ton. This year,* for some reason or other, the price has slumped so that the storehouses at Tahiti are overfull.

Amama, seated opposite to Damea, seized the great oysters one by one after he had scraped the coral growths and parasites from the shells, placed each, hinge downwards, on the planking, and with a knife cunningly inserted cut the hinge muscle. The shells instantly sprang open, and, cutting the oyster free, her delicate fingers kneaded it in search of a possible pearl.

There was no luck to-day, but the fact did not worry them; they knew from experience that pearling is the hardest of hard work with a gamble attached to it, that the shell alone can be counted on, and that a diver may open thousands of oysters without finding a pearl of any value.

Amama had opened the last and smallest of the oysters and was holding the flesh in her hand, kneading it with her fingers, when a little choking cry made Damea turn from the anchor rope which he was just about to pull in.

"Oh feel!" cried Amama.

Damea leaning forward and, taking the oyster

* 1926.

between his fingers, felt what seemed to be a pebble buried in the flesh; then, without breathing, he watched whilst the girl, gently dividing the flesh, squeezed up into the light of day what looked like a glistening white bubble, a pearl of maybe fifty grains, perfectly round and perfect in colour.

Amama held it in the palm of her hand and laughed, her partner, squatting, his elbow on the outrigger grating, gazed without a word.

Their momentary joy was checked by a thought —Cohen.

Then they began to talk. They did not wish to swindle Cohen, they reckoned that with what they had taken since the beginning of the season, and what they would take before the end, they would not only satisfy his claims but have enough over to buy the things their souls craved for and which included a concertina; but well they knew that if Cohen got wind of this great take he would have it from them by the subtle magic that was his: he would "talk it out of them," to use Amama's phrase, and leave them at last not only without the pearl but somehow in debt.

So they agreed to hide it.

"I will put it in a place ashore," said Damea, as he tucked it into the loin cloth which was his only garment: "we will hide it at the root of the big tree by your father's door; the tree that has no fellow in all Taheu. I will place it in the little round yellow box that Co-an gave me and we will bury it. And now help me with the anchor."

They hauled the anchor up and took to the paddles. Other canoes had got in when they reached the shore and the beach was beginning to swarm. The Chinese Tan Lan men (owners of a

pecies of coconut shy, where the prizes were ucky Strike cigarettes) were shouting the at-ractions of their show against the conch of the man ho ran the marionettes and the call of the woman ho sold fried bananas; and there amidst the others ure enough was Cohen, in his alpaca coat and old anama, the eternal cigar butt in the side of his outh, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, nd the big diamond on the ring finger of his hairy eft hand.

He gave good day to Damea, and the pair talked or a while; then Damea, helped by the girl, carted he shell they had taken that day to the store by Damea's house.

When that was done she turned to go home with whispered word from the other.

"When the moon is up," whispered Damea.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE MOON WAS UP

As she drew towards the house she noticed Purvis nd Wisemann at work in the little clearing: they ad got part of the canvas walls up, but the show ould not be fit for opening till the following night.

She stood looking at the two men, then she spoke o them, asking what they were doing there? And Purvis, glancing over his shoulder at her, laughed.

"What's she clacking about?" asked he of Wise-nann.

"Wants to know what we're doin' on her father's round," replied the other.

"Tell her to go hang," said Purvis.

Amama did not wait for the message to be trans-

lated, Purvis frightened her, though she only saw him side face with his eye cast back at her and his upper lip raised, showing his teeth, long and yellow. There was nothing terrifying about Purvis to the ordinary sight, but he frightened the girl almost as much as though horns were growing from his head.

She went on and reaching the house she paused at the doorway.

Jean Calabasse was in the house and he was snoring. She could smell the gin.

Amama sat down by the great tree, a species of redwood, that grew to the eastward of the doorway. She folded her hands in her lap and let her eyes rest on the lagoon across which in the sunset light the last of the pearling fleet were coming home.

She was the child of Jean Calabasse, but truly speaking, and in a psychological sense, Jean Calabasse was her child. She mended for him and cooked for him and made him keep tidy, she kept his money when he had any, and stopped him, when she could, from doing foolish things, she was also one of the million women who, all over the world and every day, are fighting the battle against drink.

He had got gin to-night, and she knew at once and instinctively that he had got it from the two strangers who were at work in the little clearing to the east. If there was one thing over which this childish old man was touchy, it was his right to the tiny bit of land including the bay in the trees. The strangers had paid him without any doubt, and he had spent the money in gin, just as a child would spend it on sweets.

Amama knew this, and she knew that she was helpless. Never in her life had she put her father

o shame by taxing him with any of his hundred ttle peccadilloes; her influence had always been y suggestion, never by reproof or accusation, and o make him own up to a fault was quite beyond er. She sat brooding, without supper and without ppetite, whilst the sun vanished and the great olden stars blazed out above the lagoon. From vhere she sat she could see by turning her head the low of the lit beach, where the village was holding evel, and the lights of the shipping casting amber ribbles on the silvery water, whilst the warm vind pattering the leaves overhead brought voices, aughter, and far snatches of song all mixed with he eternal murmur of the outer beach, the rumour f the breakers making snow beneath the stars.

The moon rose and the sounds of the night began o change; sailors' voices, shouting, came from the oat landing places, the creak of oars, the calls of vomen, then little by little, as the moon rose higher n the sky, silence began to take command, and resently on the hard sand by the tree edges there ame a step.

It was Damea.

Amama rose up to meet him.

He had brought a big broad-bladed knife for the igging and the pearl in a round yellow cigarette in that Cohen had once given him. He opened he tin and showed her the pearl carefully tucked p in a nest of wool such as the pearl buyers use for acking; then he rolled the pearl into the palm of is hand and they gloated on it like children. It ooked more lovely under the wonderful moon of Taheu even than by day. It seemed to float in the lark palm of Damea, a little ball of cloud touched vith moon-bow iridescence.

Replacing it in its box, Damea got down on hi knees and began to dig with the knife in the sand at the root of the great tree. The sand only ex tended for a few inches in depth; then came the red earth, moist and easily removed, then a root branch met the point of the knife; but the depth was suf ficient, and placing the little box in the hole, Damea covered it, smoothing the sand over all and making a nick in the tough bark of the tree immediately above the little grave.

As Amama watched him she might have seen had she turned her head, a figure just come out from the house and almost touching her black moon shadow on the sand.

It was Jean François Calabasse, whom the girl had deserted in favour of Restlessness.

For a full half-minute Jean stood, his hand on a tree bole and his eyes fixed on the doings of Damea.

Then, turning, he went back into the house to sleep some more—or to dream.

CHAPTER V

THE CRIME OF JEAN FRANÇOIS CALABASSE

For one week and three days the great Purvis-Wisemann Picture House was crammed from sunset till midnight, and seemed likely to be filled all the season. On the eleventh night, however, signs of a slump began to show themselves, and it seemed that the mysterious Play disease which attacks the best and the worst of dramatic ventures had laid its finger, somehow, on the Purvis-Wisemann production.

What disturbed the producers was not so much

the slight falling off in the crowd as the slight falling off in the enthusiasm of the audience, and in the volume of yells and shouts that attended the adventures of the girl in the Humpmobile pursued by the gun-man in the Roaring Royce, the antics of Charlie Chaplin, and the stuffing of Jeff into a barrel of molasses.

Seedman, the dealer who every night bought their takings in shell and nuts, paying in dollars, had developed quite an enthusiasm over the business and talked of coming in as partner; but the box-office receipts on the eleventh and twelfth nights rather damped his enthusiasm.

On the night of the fourteenth, when Jean François Calabasse turned up to demand his rent in advance, Purvis told him frankly to go to Medicine Hat and pick bilberries; and Wisemann having translated these directions, Jean François departed not a wiser but a sadder man.

He could not invoke the law; had he done so Amama would have known that he had been receiving money and secreting the fact from her; he could not even complain to friends lest the affair should come to her ears. A drop of drink did not matter, but in holding back the money and hiding up the transaction with Purvis and Wisemann he had committed a mean act; if Amama knew, he would be put to shame before her, a shame all the more burning because she would never upbraid him, a shame all the more blistering because he had lied to her, telling her he had given the new-comers leave to put up their show because they were good fellows for whom he had taken a liking.

So, without a drink and with the prospect of an exceedingly dry time before him, Jean François

returned to his house and lay down on his sleeping mat to chew the cud of bitterness helped out by a plug of Navy tobacco.

This house of Jean's had only two rooms, one for himself and one for the girl (they did their cooking in the open); the partition between the two rooms was of canes woven together and covered with matting, and as he lay chewing and thinking, his eyes on the glimpse of moon-burnished water visible through the doorway, he could hear mixed with the stir of the wind in the palm fronds and the murmur of the surf on the outer beach, a sound faint, living, and rhythmical, the breathing of Amama in her sleep.

Well, this was the end of the brilliant dream. He had reckoned on two dollars a week sure pocket-money till the finish of the season, money all the sweeter because it was received furtively and spent in secret, none the less sweet because in his heart he despised himself for deceiving his daughter.

Then as he lay, his jaws working and his eyes on the glittering strip of lagoon water, an idea, born of no train of thought, pushed itself up from his subconscious mind, and came to light like the pearl which Amama had squeezed out of the body of the oyster.

"Why not?"

When a man asks himself that fateful question everything is over but the doing.

"Why not?" thought Jean to himself. "Why not? But no, that would never do. Damea is a good lad and he has been kind to us; and moreover, some day I hope to see him married to Amama. It is her treasure and without any doubt he is keeping it until such time as he gets married. Eh,

ut will he ever marry her?—without doubt he ill. Besides, I could not dispose of it. Yet, why ot? There is a buyer for everything at a price. o, no, put the thing away from you, Jean François alabasse, it is an unworthy thought—and yet!"

He turned on his left side and closed his eyes; ing like this, one might have fancied him fast asleep.

The surf on the reef sang and the wind stirred the liage with the rainy patter of palm fronds; Jean alabasse seemed dreaming, lost in oblivion, dead surrounding things; then, suddenly propping himelf on his elbow, he turned his body and began to rawl across the matting to the doorway.

Outside he stood erect.

There was no one to watch or see, no one but God nd the moon and the stars and the palm trees, nd the great redwood, towering and tangling the onstellations in its branches. Amama was still sleep, wearied by her day's work, and the village ad long fallen to rest.

He came to the little ledge by the doorway where he knife lay which they used for a hundred purposes, from cleaning fish to cutting canes; then, oming to the great tree he knelt down where Damea ad knelt and began to unearth the treasure. It as not the first time he had done this business, uriosity had driven him to the work on the very ight after the thing had been buried, and he had een hugging the secret of it ever since, hugging it nnocently with not a dream or a thought of derauding Damea—till ten minutes ago. Having losed the hole and smoothed the sand Jean Francois ose up, and with the little box in his hand came ack to the house, crawled into his room and lay own.

He listened. Through the murmur of the surf and the wind in the trees he heard the breathing of the gentle and innocent Amama in her sleep.

CHAPTER VI

THE AMBER NECKLACE

For days after that Jean François was a man who took little interest in his food or in the life around him. Amama, one day fancying that he was ill, offered to forego the fishing and stay with him during the day so as to cook his midday meal, but he repulsed her. If she was so ready to do that all of a sudden, why had she not thought of it before? She who was always running wild about the place with that good-for-nothing Damea; he wanted no one to stay with him, he could cook his own food, he wanted no food, he was old and not long for this world, and all he really wanted was to be let alone.

Amama listened to him, terrified. Never had he spoken to her like this before, never before had he looked at her like that out of the side of his eyes as if in dislike.

A little later when she was out on the lagoon with Damea, he might have noticed that something was wrong with the girl, but Damea's mind was otherwise engaged. To Damea, as to a child, the moment was everything and the thing on hand. He had assisted that morning at the partial dismemberment of a tiger shark, and his mind was full of the business. The shark, rendered unable to bite, see, or steer, was parading the lagoon, a moving horror and a warning to its fellows, and the sight of it as

t appeared at intervals left Amama quite unmoved
y pity, for the very good reason that she had once
een the upper half of a diver who had been dealt
vith by a tiger shark.

She knelt by the forward outrigger pole, receiving
he oysters as Damea brought them up, and all the
vhile brooding on the subject of her father, the
lepression that had been on him for days, and his
hanged manner towards her.

They put back an hour before sun-down and as
hey drew in towards the beach they noticed that
omething of an unusual nature was going forward,
vomen were laughing and children shouting and
ostling as they followed a figure that was strutting
bout, the figure of a man waving a canoe paddle
bove his head.

It was Jean François Calabasse—drunk!

Drunk, and calling on his ancestors to follow him
nd fight for the true faith against the heathen
ccupants of Taheu.

The sight of Amama made him drop the paddle
nd forget his ancestors and allow himself to be led
uietly enough to the house and his sleeping mat,
vhere they covered him with a blanket and left
im to his dreams.

Next day, quite unashamed and reinflated with
lcohol obtained from some mysterious source, he
alled Amama to him and presented her with an
mitation amber necklace worth at least two dollars.

"It has been given to me," said Jean, with a
iccup. "It is yours; you have the right to wear such
hings, for are you not the daughter of Jean François
alabasse? I have good friends. A man of my
irth is never without friends if he knows where
o look for them. Kneel down."

She knelt, and he put the thing round he neck.

"Never forget," said Jean, "that you are daughter of France; let this gift ever remind yo that you are a daughter of France and also of a honest man." Then he began to cry and Amama with the amber beads round her neck, left the hous deeply disturbed in her mind.

Outside she saw Damea approaching, come t fetch her for the fishing, and instinctively sh whipped the things off and held them in her hand

"What have you there?" asked Damea.

"Nothing," said Amama, "only these." Sh opened her hand and showed the beads. "Fathe gave them to me, but I do not want to wear then now." She ran back into the house and hid then in her room, then they started for the fishing Damea asking no questions as his mind was full o another matter, a fish trap which he was going t try next night in the great pools of the outer beach

CHAPTER VII

THE SHARK KNIFE

Now at the back of the Calabasse house there wa a place where rubbish was thrown by Jean, fish bones and odds and ends of food to be disposed o by the robber crabs, old bottles and empty cans.

Next morning, passing this place, the girl caugh sight of a tin box half-exposed where either crab or children had been poking deep into the pile. Sh picked it up. It was the box in which Damea ha hidden the pearl.

She was sure, for some of the cotton-wool packing was still in it. She was certain because of a dent in the side which she had noticed on the night of the burial.

She ran, box in hand, to the great tree, and kneeling down, examined the sand at the root just below the little nick in the bark; the sand seemed undisturbed.

It was still early morning, Damea would not be ready to start for the pearling grounds for half an hour or so, and Jean had gone off to the village, there was no one to see her, and running to the house she fetched the big knife from the shelf outside and returned to the tree.

It was a case knife and, as she drew it from its sheath, she noticed just where the blade met the haft a trace of red earth. Then she knew that Jean Francois Calabasse was a thief, and where the money had come from that he'd paid for his recent drinking bouts, the necklace he had given her and his other extravagances. The unbelievable stood before her and said, I am the truth. Truth stood before her and said, I am the unbelievable. With a little cry that was half a sob she began to dig, casting the sand aside and attacking the earth beneath in search, not for a pearl, but the honour of her father. It was not there. The knife met the tree root, explored in every direction; nothing.

Slowly, and like a person in a dream, she began to fill in the hole, she smoothed the sand over all carefully with her palms, the tears were running down her face and they fell on the little grave where her love for Jean and her belief in him lay buried for ever.

The weaknesses that had made him somehow

lovable, all had vanished as though they had nev
been—nothing remained but a thief, hard and hear
less. She rose and came into the house and havi
replaced the knife on the shelf, hid the tin in h
room beneath some matting. Then she stood, h
hands arranging her hair just as though nothing
all had occurred, yet of what she was doing she had n
the slightest idea; then she lay down with her hea
on the matting that hid that accursed tin.

A step sounded outside; it was Damea come
fetch her to the fishing; but she said she was il
that her head ached and she wanted to be left alon
He went off to fetch Oti, the son of old Timu, wh
sometimes helped him; and Amama heard him g
and then lay listening to the wind in the trees.

She could think now clearly and almost witho
pain, as though the venom of the wound had numbe
her sensitiveness whilst leaving her brain free
work. Two things she had to do—protect the nam
of her father and make good the loss to Dame
Jean had sold the pearl, it must be recovered som
how and without the world knowing that he ha
stolen it.

Somebody passed the front of the house. It wa
Jean returned from the village, he had brought bac
a fowl plucked and ready for cooking, and when th
girl came out she found him kneeling by the ho
in the ground which he used for an oven, the fo
beside him. When he saw her, he called to h
to go and fetch him some leaves to wrap the bi
in, asking at the same time how it came about tha
she was not with Damea at the fishing?

She did not answer, she came straight up an
knelt before him by the fire hole.

"Father," said Amama, "a little time ago whe

I was with Damea in his canoe he found a pearl, a great pearl, larger and more beautiful than any I have seen taken from the water."

"Oh," said Jean, "he found a pearl!" Without raising his eyes to her, he took the fowl in his hands and held it as if weighing it.

"He hid it beneath the great tree," she went on, "and now it is gone and I know who has taken it."

The old man said nothing, confessing everything by his silence; he picked at the skin of the bird and turned it over in his hands.

Jean François, a nobleman in his ideas when drunk, was without the pride of a gentleman when sober.

He was sure in his mind that Amama had seen him taking the thing or she would never have spoken like that.

"One night," said Jean, "coming to my door I saw that young man on his knees burying something on my property. You, too, were there. You were hiding this thing from Jean François Calabasse, who dug and found it. Has he no right to dig on his own property, and is not what he finds there his own? Eh?"

"Father," said Amama, "the pearl was Damea's, and if I do not find it and give it back to him I will tie a piece of coral to my waist and give myself to the lagoon as Omara did, she who was betrayed by Timu."

Jean dropped the fowl and began to swear. He had braved out the business, his words, seemingly extemporized, were really the voicing of a long train of conscious and subconscious conversations and suggestions.

"I have taken the pearl, it is true, but what of

it? Who is Damea, anyhow, the bastard of Spaniard; of a man, moreover, who had outrun th law. Then, where did I take it from? My ow property. It was mine, seeing it was buried o my ground. May a man not dig on his own groun and keep what he finds?"

That was all very well. It sounded splendi when he was talking it, but it was all shrivelled t rags by the threat of Amama.

Jean knew she would do what she said; he knev the type and he knew the girl. He was badl frightened.

"Though it was found on my own property," said he, "you shall have it back. God knows bu I have granted your every wish. See now, it i Wisemann has the pearl, the big man of the runnin pictures." Jean paused for a moment and the went on: "Fifteen dollars he lent me, keeping th thing as security, here is twenty dollars."

He took from his pocket two ten dollar bills tie round with a bit of coconut sennit, and spreadin them open, handed them to Amama.

"I had spent the money all but one dollar," sai Jean, "but last night with that dollar I wo twenty-five from the Chinese gambling men. I wa in luck. Take the money to Wisemann and ge your pearl, and give him five dollars for interest."

Amama heaved a deep sigh and hid the mone in her girdle. She rose up and without a wor glided off, vanishing past the great tree in the direc tion of Purvis and Wisemann's camp, whilst Jean alone with the facts that the money he had wo the night before was all but gone and that Amama for all his explanations, knew him for a thief, sa for a moment without a movement. Then he seize

he fowl by the legs, bashed its body on the ground, lung it to fester in the sun, and retiring to the house, began to drink gin on an empty stomach.

The movie encampment when Amama reached it, was temporarily deserted. Purvis and Wisemann never bothered much about breakfast, and they had gone to the village this morning to see Jarvis, who was a sort of agent for the Papeete Mail company, with a view of getting a lift out of Taheu. They were anxious to quit, and ready to work their passage to anywhere out of the God-forsaken atoll that had "rose up and hit them in the face."

The movie show was "bust," the gunmen would never chase the girl in the humpmobile again, and Charlie Chaplin would jump no more. Purvis, after desperate efforts to sell the projecting machine, had got drunk and smashed it; it was the only pleasure he had had since coming to Taheu.

Having seen Jarvis this morning, they made their way back towards the encampment and the shade of the trees. Purvis was in an evil temper, twelve dollars was all that remained to him after the clear-up of the show; Wisemann, who declared that twenty dollars would buy all that he had in his pockets, was in a more equable mood.

When they reached the trees, Amama was waiting for them. She had taken her seat on a fallen palm trunk, with her back to the sagging canvas that had formed the west wall of the theatre, and when she saw them she rose to her feet.

She wasted no words. Holding out the two ten-dollar bills to Wisemann, she demanded the pearl.

Wisemann, the picture of mild surprise, asked her what she meant, and when she told him, denied

knowledge of the whole transaction. He knew nothing of any pearl, Jean François was mad or drunk, he refused to touch the dollar bills and told her to go.

Purvis looked on, deeply interested. He could not understand the language of Taheu in which they were talking, but he understood the Taheuan word for pearl, which came so often into what they said; the girl was offering Wisemann two ten-dollar notes; she seemed excited, more, she was angry—what could it all be about?

Then into his fox-like brain came a suspicion of the truth. They were talking of a pearl, and the girl was offering the other money. Wisemann had got a pearl out of Jean François, probably when Jean was drunk, and the girl was trying to get it back.

Purvis knew quite well that Wisemann had lied to him half an hour ago, when he declared that twenty dollars would buy everything in his pocket—and now this! But he said nothing till Amama, giving the matter up, went away, her head bowed, crushed, unable to understand the wickedness of the world that had caught her as in a net.

Then, when she was gone, Purvis turned to the other.

"What was she offering you them bills for?" asked he.

"What bills?" asked Wisemann, who was perspiring and wiping his brow with his sleeve.

"The dollar bills."

"Oh, them—she's crazy, plumb crazy. Wants us to clear out of here, offered me the money if we'd clear out."

"Shucks," said Purvis.

"Whatcha mean?"

"I knew all about it right from the bottom up—saw you."

"Saw me what?"

"Take the pearl off that lousy Frenchman. I as laffin'—laffin' all the time I was, while you were ndin' out that dope about twenty dollars coverin' hat you had in your pockets! Come, bail up; lf of that pearl's mine, and half your bank roll o, or by the livin' God I'll split."

"You'll which?" asked the other, whose pupils d broadened till his eyes looked black instead pale blue.

"Go to the French chap that's superintendin' the heries and give him the word you've pinched at pearl off Jane—damn his name. His daughter ill back me."

Wisemann contemplated the other for a moment. urvis, the first sight of whom had frightened mama, had always been for Wisemann an object indifference, he had looked on him as a man of account, an egg to be sucked. The scorpion at had suddenly burst from the egg astonished d frightened him.

His lips pressed themselves together, he looked Purvis's feet, then his gaze rose to his face.

"We must settle this thing between us," said he, we've been good partners—I ain't denyin' that ve looked to my own pocket and played my own and, and I ain't denyin' you've got the bulge on e: well, we'll split the profits, I can't say fairer an that."

"First, and to begin with," said Purvis, "you've t to fork the money out to get us off this damn e-dish, I ain't goin' to work no passages to Tahiti,

What's your bank roll? Here, sit down so's we ca talk."

"I am not denyin' I've two hundred and fift dollars on me," said Wisemann, taking his sea with the other on the fallen tree, "but that's m capital."

"Blow your capital, it'll have to go into th workin' expenses. Now fetch out the pearl."

"It's not with me," said Wisemann, "it's cache away there, where the trees are thick—think I' such a fool to carry it on me?"

"Well, come and dig it up."

"There you are again," said the other; "ni fools we'd be muckin' about in the trees with a those women copra workers about. No, sir, con sundown, when they're gone, I'm not sayin'——'

"Well, maybe you're right," said Purvis, "getti along for then we'll go, you and I. Is that fixe in your head?"

"I'll be with you."

"And no tricks, Billy Wisemann."

"Lord, do I look like tricks?" said Billy.

He didn't.

The bagginess under his eyes had increased, an the general flaccidity of his appearance. He turne into the shade of the trees for a sleep, and Purv walking off, made for the village, where from A Fong, the Chinese seller of odds and ends, he boug a shark knife, seven inches long in the blade, an keen as a razor.

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT ON THE OUTER BEACH

An hour before sundown, Damea, who had con back from the pearling in order to set his fish tra

the outer beach pools, was making for the house
Jean Francois Calabasse, when, drawing near to
e glade and the remains of the rag and stick
eatre, he heard voices, as if in argument.
The voice of Wisemann and the voice of Purvis.
e disliked these gentry, and being as inquisitive
a cat, he stopped dead to listen. He could
ake out little of what they were saying; so drawing
oser and peeping through the trees he saw them
anding facing one another, then he saw Purvis
king Wisemann by the arm and the two walking
vay together right into the thickness of the groves.
He placed the fish trap on the ground and fol-
wed them. There was something on hand be-
veen those two, but what on earth could it be to
ad them into the groves?
Damea could move as soundless as a shadow,
nd when his curiosity was aroused he had four ears,
nd the back of his head was supplied with eyes.
He followed them by sound and sight till they
anished. They had sat down close to a big bread-
uit. He drew closer and heard and saw all.
Wisemann had sat down first.
"Now here we are, Jimmy Purvis," said the fat
an as the other took his seat opposite to him.
"Here we are and I wants to get this matter
ght with you. Half the pearl you says, and I'm
illin' to agree to that, but it's the question of
ollars that's raisin' my hump. See here, J. P.,
m willin' to pay expenses to Tahiti, where we'll
ash in the pearl; but it's a bit thick askin' me to
olit the money which is workin' capital."
"Well," said Purvis, "I don't want to drive you,
illy, I ain't no shark, and we'll talk of that matter
fterwards. No, I don't want to drive you, and

I'll say right now if you acts square about the pea
I'll take it at that. You pays the fares to Tahi
which won't be more than forty dollars apiece
and now dig up the joker."

"Which I will," replied Wisemann, "it's under
tree but safe in my pocket, where it was when
was talking to that piece Amama."

The name made the listening Damea lean forwa
as Wisemann, putting his hand in his pocket, pr
duced something wrapped up in cotton wool. H
undid the wool, produced the pearl, and held it
the palm of his left hand for the other to see.

Damea, watching, saw the shark knife flash
Purvis's hand, saw him strike, miss, and fall sid
ways with something sticking in his chest.

"That does you!" cried Wisemann. "Hell!"

Rolling over, the dying Purvis had got hom
swift, like the stroke of a scorpion, the knife was
Wisemann's groin, then as Wisemann lay screami
like a woman or a seagull, Purvis, his eyes ha
closed and his teeth bare, struck again, driving t
knife into Wisemann's chest this time. Four bea
of a pendulum would have covered the whc
tragedy. Purvis lay dead. The other seemed de
till, all of a sudden, he heaved up, struggled to h
knees, the blood pouring from his mouth, a
collapsed again, his head on the outstretched ar
of the man he had killed.

Damea watched curiously till the form of the b
man had ceased heaving and twitching, like a ne
caught palu, then he came close.

Wisemann had used for weapon an obsidian spe
head, keen as a razor and brittle as glass with t
inches of the haft still adhering to it; he must ha
prepared this weapon on purpose.

Damea touched each of the bodies with his foot, hen he picked up the pearl that was lying on the ground close to Wisemann.

He held it in his palm and looked at it, heedless of the creatures at his feet as though they had been wo dead crows. The word "Amama" uttered by Wisemann was still in his ears, and this was the pearl he had hidden with Amama. He was sure of that, but he could not understand.

How came it here and how came it that Amama's name had been mentioned?

With the pearl clasped in his hand he turned and ran through the woods, breaking from them near he clearing.

The house of Jean Francois Calabasse stood open o the winds of heaven. It was all front doorway vith no front door, only reed curtains rarely drawn, unless in heavy rains.

Jean was in the house snoring, Damea could see nto Amama's room, but she was not there. The necklace was there, hanging from a nail on the wall, or in Taheu nobody steals things left in houses, nd as Damea stood looking at the necklace, it was s though suddenly it spoke. How had Amama btained it? why, for days had she been so de-ressed? where had Jean Calabasse obtained the noney for his festivities?

Damea came into the girl's room; he looked about im to see what else she might have bought or btained beside the necklace; he turned over the nats in the corner and there before his eyes lay the igarette tin. He picked it up and came outside vith it. Yes, it was the tin he had used for hiding he pearl, some of the cotton wool was still in it. He flung it away amidst the trees as though it had

burned him, saw the knife on the shelf by the hou side and, picking it up, ran to the great tree whe he began to dig, just as Amama had dug, hopi against hope. He found nothing, and, springing his feet, he flung the knife away from him on to t sands, stood rigid with his hands clenched and th ran to the knife and picked it up. An onlook might have fancied him playing some sort of gam He was, playing a game with Death, for if Aman had shown herself at that moment, he would ha driven the knife into her heart.

He looked at the knife, turning it over in h hands, then, taking it by the haft he flung it far in the lagoon in a storm of rage that turned, all of sudden, into a storm of tears, that cast him on t sands, his face on his arms.

His life's companion had betrayed him, stolen h pearl and sold it. His left hand still held the pea grasped tight, he had it safe, he was not thinkin of it, and he was no longer angry, but he w broken. Amama had stolen his pearl, and sold It was as though the sun had stopped shining, though the lagoon had gone dry, as though the tre had suddenly withered, and it was worse than a these things which would have happened outsi himself; something inside himself had gone ou dried up, withered.

Amama had betrayed him!

Never had he known that Amama was part himself, that though he rarely thought of her, s was part of his mind—never till now.

He rose up, shuddering, and came along by t trees. In the little clearing he saw the fish tr he had dropped when he followed the two men; wit out knowing what he did he picked it up and wi

in his right hand and clasping the pearl in his left, e came through the trees towards the outer beach. He had to keep moving, and the fish trap, acting n his subconscious mind, dictated his direction; e purpose for which he had landed that evening as still there and he was following its direction, nconscious as the dead.

Then he found himself on the outer reef before the w tide sea, lit by the last of the sunset, and there, y a great pool that glittered like a golden shield, e wind tormenting her black hair, stood Amama. He dropped the trap.

Her face was turned towards him, and her eyes ere fixed on him, and all at once as he looked at r across the hundred yards of coral that separated em, the anger that had left him returned, but in new form; slow and dull and burning, urging him ither to strike nor kill nor upbraid, but to come her, get close to her, and look her in the face.

He came across the coral, his left hand tightly asped, close up to her his hand sprung open and e held it out with the pearl in the palm. Not a ord; yet he was so close to her that he could have uched her. Amama, frozen by his look and his ence, gazed at the great pearl, then she fell on r knees and clasping him by the legs so that he uld not move, began to cry out for mercy, mercy wards her father.

"Oh, Damea," cried the girl, "I knew, I knew— t it was too late, he had sold it, he sold it to the rangers. I tried to buy it back, but the big man ould not listen to me. Oh, my father! He watched bury it that night and stole it and sold it to the rangers—your pearl, Damea! I knew, and it has rned my heart away, for it was my father, and

here I came to cast myself in the water when th darkness would cover me; here I shall die when th darkness comes, for the shame I cannot bear."

And Damea stood listening, half-comprehending then comprehending, life coming slowly back int his heart, the pearl dropped from his hand to th coral, he had forgotten it.——Amama had not be trayed him—she was here the same as of old, an yet changed as though she had become a new being

He disengaged her arms and raised her to he feet; the tenderness of his touch and the caress o his hand as he raised her body made her dumb— he had forgiven—forgiven her father. Eh! bu what was this? He was holding her in his arms he who had scarcely ever touched her before, hi breast to her breast, crushing her to him—why His lips were kissing her hair and, as she raised he face, they fastened on her eyes, her lips, her ver soul. Then, half fainting, she knew.

She who had never known love, as he had neve known it—till now.

As they sat beside each other in the darknes an hour old, Damea, his arm still around the wais of Amama, leaned forward.

The pearl lay where he had dropped it and withi reach of his hand; the pearl that had slain tw men and made a thief of Jean François Calabass and all but killed Amama; the pearl that was wealt in its most beautiful form—but to the mind of thi half-child a thing to be dreaded. He picked i up, and standing with the girl by the great dar pool now filling to the tide, he cast it to the wate where it sank, a gleam of phosphorous followed b a train of tiny golden bubbles.

MIRCAMI

MIRCAMI

CHAPTER I

THERE are some things that the mind of man can recognize without fully comprehending, and one of those things is the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

When people say that the Pacific is spoilt by civilization they are right, in so far as the larger islands are concerned: they have motor-cars in Tahiti now, and worse at Honolulu, the B. P. boats bring trade to places that were once part of the kingdom of Fairyland, and the soap boiler has his hand on the tall groves, and the Rue de la Paix its agents by the pearl lagoons. But there are still islands in this vast world of waters where gin and petrol have not entirely displaced the fragrance of frangipanni, and the milk of the drinking nuts, and where for an hour, even still, one may forget the problems of life in a world where the east is simply the place that the sun comes up from, and the west the place where he sinks.

Vauhine, for instance.

It is a very small island, yet a high one. You can see it from a long way off at sea, like a ship under press of dark-coloured sails. Then, as you draw nearer it broadens a bit at the base, and the darkness becomes the green of foliage—immemorial woods planted by the hand of God before man dreamed of the first canoe, or woman of love, or the first shell necklace.

Slade came to Vauhine when he was a man of thirty five, hard-bitten and pretty hardly used by the world He came as trader and partner with a man name Lomax who carried on in San Francisco. Loma had his finger in all sorts of pies, and this trad station at Vauhine was the smallest of the lot; th copra to be got here was just enough to keep single station going, and Lomax would have le the thing to someone else, only he was fond Slade; reckoned this was a post that would fit hi limitations, and put him in.

It was a pleasant place for a man who had see more than enough of the rough side of the world and of mischance.

The old bungalow belonging to the first trader— he dealt in sandalwood as well as copra—had gon out of repair, and the patching of it up gave th new-comer something to do; the garden also gav him work, oap and all sorts of weeds had to b rooted out, and new seeds planted, and new fence put up. For months he was busy and happy; h was making a home. He told himself that, com what might, he would never leave Vauhine, eve if the trade station failed, one could live ther without money, food was everywhere to be had fo the scratching of the soil or the dropping of a fish hook in the sea; and he did not drink.

The last great fact was the linch-pin of his chario Without it life in this paradise would have becom degeneracy—a weariness developing into a horror.

CHAPTER II

One evening, six months or so after he arrive Slade was leaning on the fence of his little garde

smoking and looking towards the sea, visible beyond the palms bordering the copra road by which the bungalow was placed.

Beyond and through the scene before him he was looking at his past.

London and New York and San Francisco, the businesses he had engaged in and had failed at, and the fact that, leaving Lomax aside, he had no friends. He had been a rolling stone and, more than that, he was not a man given to the easy making of friends.

There are some men, and sometimes they are rogues, who, if dropped in any part of the world, except maybe the Kalahari Desert, will begin to make friends with all and sundry, attach other men to them as helpers and with their help make success.

It is a wonderful gift. Slade did not possess it. Maybe because he was too honest, maybe because he was stand-offish by nature, reserved and unGiven to wearing his heart on his sleeve.

However that may be, it was so and, being human, he sometimes recognized the fact of his isolation with regret, as on this evening.

Standing, pipe in mouth and lost in his thoughts, something beyond the far trees drew his attention back to earth.

Forms were moving against the light of the sea glow, and now they were coming along the copra road, forms of girls just up from bathing, the sunlight on their pareus, flowers fresh gathered in their hair.

Amidst them was Mircami, the daughter of Poni the fisherman, a girl who had attracted Slade's notice before this on account of a variation from the ordinary type. The nose of Mircami, unlike that of Kinai or Kenusi or any of the others, was not

broad across the nostrils, and it had a more definite bridge; there were other points in the girl's face that suggested European ancestry.

Having noticed her, he had nearly forgotten her. This evening, as she passed the gate with the others she looked at him.

Their eyes met.

She passed on with the rest and was lost to view beyond the tree ferns and Jack fruits, and Slade having watched her from sight, returned to his house.

He was no longer alone. Yet an hour — ten minutes ago—had you mentioned Mircami's name, he would have had to think for a moment before disentangling her from the other people of the island.

She had never glanced at him before, to his knowledge, and now, all of a sudden, her eyes had looked straight into his heart and soul.

CHAPTER III

On the highest point of Vauhine, that is to say, on the cliff to the westward side, there is a stone cut and chiselled by some long-forgotten craftsman and left there, no man can say why, for there are no temple places at Vauhine, nor gods carved from rock as on Easter Island.

This stone, which is taller than the tallest man and which is called by the Kanakas the Man Stone, stands like a silent outpost gazing out to sea, whilst the woods behind it whisper and shiver in the sea wind and it was here that Slade and Mircami used to meet, lovers pledged to marry one another when Adams, the missionary, paid his next visit to the island.

It was not what one might call a rapid-combustion love affair. Slade had left behind him the

fires of youth, and Mircami, owing perhaps to the European strain in her, was less inflammable than the ordinary island girl, more thoughtful, and with far greater depth of feeling.

They would sit and talk, the blue sea far below and the pattering palms and whispering ferns behind them. She could speak a little English, having picked it up from the former trader and from Adams, and Slade proved such a good tutor that by the time the missionary schooner was due to call, she could carry on a conversation on simple matters without difficulty.

It was a love affair and a language lesson at the same time, but none the less a love affair for that, and between these two a bond began to form, a bond more genuine and lasting than that of passionate love—the bond of affection.

They became part of one another as though their beings had flowed together to make one river.

CHAPTER IV

One evening, a few days before the missionary schooner was due to arrive, Slade started out with Pari, one of the native boys, to fish beyond the reef. Fishing was the one amusement to be had at Vauhine; it had several forms, spearing by torchlight on the reef, fishing in the lagoon for groper or bream, or outside the reef for tiapu, the great rock fish.

The outrigger canoe was down by the water's edge, and Pari was overhauling the tackle, whilst Mircami, who had brought down the provisions and the drinking nuts, was busily engaged stowing them in packages tied to the outrigger gratings.

There is an unwritten law at Vauhine—you must

not go beyond the reef without provisions and drink enough to last you for days. One never knows the chances of the sea, whose other name is the Great Thirst.

Mircami would have gone with Slade, only that she was no use in a canoe, and in fishing for the deep-sea pālu one must be an expert. She hated these expeditions that took him away from the island by even a mile or two, yet they pleased him and she said nothing, knowing that a word from her would make him give them up.

The drinking nuts tied to the gratings, she helped to run the little craft down till it was water borne; then she watched it sail off in the last of the sunset light, and the flash of Slade's steering paddle as he waved it to her, whilst Pari broke out the sail.

Outside the reef the swell ran low, and the thunder of the reef to the sea was less than usual. The sun was taking his plunge into an ocean that boiled up to him like molten gold, and the breeze that had blown strong on their passing the reef died, so that the mat sail flapped now and then against the mast.

They were making for the fishing ground, which lies a mile beyond the reef, and where the depths run from twenty to forty fathoms. This is the place where the great fish congregate of nights and feed when they are so inclined. Two miles to northward of the fishing ground runs, for a distance of four miles east and west, a great submerged reef at a depth of six fathoms. It is known as the shark reef, and in heavy weather, at every seventh or eighth wave, it breaks in a pother of foam that has whirled many a canoe to destruction.

Pari, though only sixteen, knew the sea round

here and all its traps and currents; night made no difference to him, and now, with the sun gone and the stars rushing out, he took the direction of affairs, holding on till Vauhine showed, a blur on the night, seemingly a great way to southward.

"It is here," said Pari, taking in his steering paddle and tying up the sail, whilst Slade got the stone anchor across the gunnel and dropped it, letting the rope run till twenty fathoms were out. "It is here, and we will have luck, for the wind has gone, and the sea has fallen asleep."

"Maybe," said Slade.

Then, taking their places, bow and stern, they fished.

The great fish is uncertain; for nights together they will not look at a bait, and at Vauhine they deserted the grounds once for so long a time that the fishing canoes deserted them, too.

"They are not here," said Slade after the lines had been down for nearly an hour, only to be hauled up to find that some bait nibbler had been feeding on the bait. "They have gone to follow the wind, or maybe, like the sea, they have fallen asleep."

"They are here," said Pari, and almost on his word and as if in answer to it, a chug came to Slade's line.

It ran out a couple of yards before he could get command of it, and then the fight began, the great fish zig-zagging, sounding, now darting ahead of the canoe, now astern, Pari, with the paddle, preventing the line from fouling the anchor rope, Slade steadily making good.

Then, like a great silver sword in a bath of phosphorus, bending, straightening, flashing, the great fish showed alongside, whilst Pari, maul in hand, waited to make sure of the stroke.

"O he," cried Slade, and the maul fell and the great fish stiffened after a last convulsion that covered the canoe and the fishermen in spray.

They hauled it on board, and, re-baiting, dropped their lines. The dead calm held, and from far off the reef of Vauhine sent its whisper across the star-lit sea. Suddenly the voice of the reef came louder.

"The wind has gone," said Pari, after a minute or two had passed, "and yet the reef still cries out."

As he spoke the canoe lifted under them to a steeper swell; it was as though a giant, unseen hand had raised them swiftly but gently towards the stars, releasing them to fall back in the trough.

It was a big lift, for the slack of the anchor rope was eaten up by it, and the strain on the rope made the canoe heel to starboard, so that the outrigger lifted clear of the water.

Pari sprang on the outrigger gratings to steady them, and the voice of the Vauhine reef grew suddenly louder through the night, bringing with it another sound, the voice of tormented trees.

"The wind!" cried Pari.

It came on th m with a rush, the great south wind that blows when it listeth, that comes always from a clear sky and whose coming no man can foretell. It seized the sail and blew it out like a flag with the broken sheet flapping against the stars: it tried to capsize them, but Pari, with the knife he always carried, cut the anchor rope and, whilst Slade steadied the canoe with a paddle, recaptured the sail by a miracle and lashed it, giving only the smallest bunt to keep them before the wind.

To turn was impossible in that suddenly risen sea; they had to run or drown.

Neither of them spoke a word. Thought was wiped out by the wind and the grab that Death was making for them. They could only steer, whilst the stars looked down and the wind screamed against the guy ropes of the mast, and the spray dashed over them as the stern dipped an inch too deep, or the paddles missed a stroke.

Then Slade, who had recovered thought, cried out to the other:

"Pari, we are being swept away for ever, the current is with us, unless we turn we can go back no more."

"We cannot turn," replied Pari, "the sea is too great. We are dead, for before us is the great reef."

Slade had not thought of that. The thing scarcely troubled him. Death was nothing to being swept away from Vauhine and Mircami, yet they could not turn. Pari spoke the truth.

The wind had fallen, but the sea was as great as ever. Time passed and then, suddenly, Pari, who was in the bow, turned his head and flung two words back at the other:

"The reef!"

On the top of the next swell Slade, half lifting himself, saw it, a long burst of foam stretching to east and west in the starlight, a white wall that rose and subsided, for, viewing the northern sea from the next swell top, it had vanished.

He knew that it was not permanent, that it came only with the larger waves, and that if they struck the spot in the interval they might escape with a tossing, but at this crucial moment escape or death seemed all one. He was looking on at the moving picture of another man's actions, without the interest that such a picture would afford him were

he seated comfortably in a theatre, and untroubled in mind.

In other words, he had lost the capacity for reflection and calculation, the word "if" had gone out of his vocabulary. No man can be frightened who has lost the power of using, as a counter of mind, that wretched word of two letters.

Suddenly, and close to them, and against the full force of the wind, the great reef spoke, raved and flung up before them a wall of foam. The black sea in front of them seemed to have gone mad under the starlight, then the bottle-glass well of the following trough took them: they sank into it, and when the spume-topped crest of the following hill raised them to look, the wall of foam was gone, leaving only acres of milk heaving to the stars.

Pari yelled, then he shouted to Slade to paddle hard and, urged by the wind in the bunt of the sail and the paddles, they shot into the heaving cream that fizzed like the wake of some steamer of a million tons, and tossed them here and tossed them there, as an idle woman might toss a ball from hand to hand.

The run of the swell, though broken, was not destroyed, it lifted them and sank them still, only now they were being lifted and sunk, not in a world of jet-black starlit waters, but a world of boiling and hissing milk.

Six times were they lifted thus, and then, almost at a stroke of the paddle, the black waters were around them again and the great white wastes behind.

They had escaped the reef waters, but only by a minute, for now, from behind them, came the boom of the breaking sea, hard on the wind that followed them.

To Slade it was like the bang of a door, a door that cut him off from Vauhine, and the woman he loved.

CHAPTER V

THE sun rose on a heaving swell all glittering gold in the east and wind-tossed violet in the west. The south wind still blew hard and strong, and to turn the canoe was still impossible. Even if they could have turned her, they would have made no way against that wind and current.

"We shall return no more," said Pari, "and my fish spear and my lines will be used by Dakea; no more shall I pluck the feis in the great grove or pound the kava for Tomi. The sea has taken us."

Slade said nothing.

Deep down in his heart there was a feeling that perhaps all was not lost; the escape from the reef waters was a good omen, and the splendid sun burning him now on the right shoulder gave him heart.

He was not like Pari. To Pari the open sea, beyond sight of land, was the utterly unknown and the utterly untrustable, a thing uncharted, and holding only two sure things—death or separation from all that the islander holds dear.

At noon the wind fell to a strong breeze: an hour later, away on the port bow far across the sea, stood a white point that grew and broadened and became the sails of a ship, grew and lifted, till the dark hull showed, leaping clearer to sight, moment by moment.

It was a topsail schooner, steering as if to cut their course. She held on without change or sign, like a blind thing that did not see them, never

would see them, held on till now, the sun broad o her canvas, the reef-points showed and the foa building round her forefoot.

Then, as if touched by some magic finger, sh altered in form and the wind shivered from her sail

Ten minutes later Slade was on her deck, she ha taken the wind again, and the canoe, cast adrift was tossing in her wake. She was the *Sea Horse* twenty days out from San Francisco and bound fo Vana Vana.

CHAPTER VI

To lose a small Pacific island—unless you are wealthy man able to hire a schooner—is like losin your purse in London.

There are no sea roads between the small islands at Vana Vana you might wait twenty years befor getting a ship to Vauhine, and at Vauhine yo might wait twenty years before getting a ship t even the nearest island, Tiari.

The *Sea Horse* was going north at the will Trade, and at Vana Vana it left Slade and Par who had worked their passage and who, when the were put ashore, got jobs to keep them going till luc would bring a ship to take them to San Francisco.

Once in San Francisco, Slade could depend o Lomax to send him back to Vauhine. There wa nothing to do but wait and hope and work.

It was a man's job, with the figure of Mircan ever before him. Mircami who, without doub fancied him dead and gone. There were time when the thought of her nearly drove him t despair. The thought of her waiting and watchin through the storm, and through all the days tha followed, for the canoe that never came back.

She would know of the great reef and the ertainty that they would be driven across it, and of ne almost certainty that they would be lost.

The reef would stand as a barrier between her nd hope, the great reef that had wrecked the war anoes from Tiari in the old days, and since then ad taken as payment heavy toll of the fishers of auhine.

All this nearly filled Slade's mind with despair: ut he fought it down and then, one day, a ship ame; she was bound for San Francisco and would ake Slade with her, but the captain refused Pari.

He had no use for a Kanaka on board his ship. he refusal was absolute. The choice was given o Slade to go and leave Pari, or to remain.

To leave Pari, helpless and hopeless of ever getting ack to his beloved home.

It was then that just as the great reef showed to he deep rooting swell the soul of Slade showed tself to his Maker.

He refused to leave Pari. Pari, who had steered vith him through the storm; Pari, who in this world f men was as helpless as a child. The consequences f the refusal were worse to face than the great eef, yet he faced them and came through, for the lay before the ship sailed two hands fell sick and ad to be landed, and the captain, short-handed, greed to take Pari.

At San Francisco Lomax arranged for the earlier ailing of the schooner that he used for trade with auhine, and on a day six months and a week after is departure from the island, Slade found himself ack within the reef and the anchor chain rumbling down to its echo from the cliffs and woods.

CHAPTER VII

THE beach was crowded as he rowed ashore. Poni and Timeau, Keola, Le Moan, Narau, Kalia were there, and a host of others that he knew, but he did not see Mircami.

They greeted him and his companion, not as people returned from the shades, but from the land of good fortune. Nothing that the sea could do would have surprised those islanders, who had seen their canoe men come back apparently from the dead, who had seen the great storm of 1905, and who had seen the tidal wave that broke the following year, a wave that had climbed the cliffs on the windward side of the island, taking back with it a whole little village and its inhabitants.

"But Mircami," cried Slade to her father, Poni "where is she that she is not here?"

Poni's head fell just as it did when he was busy with the making or the mending of a net. He said nothing.

Then a woman's voice piped up.

"Mircami is no more. The sea has taken her."

And then it all came out, told by this one and that, told in bits, picked up through the days and weeks that followed in little details.

It was as though some beautiful thing had been shattered to fragments, and Slade was always picking up the bits from this one and that, from Timeau, who told how she had watched and watched, hoping against hope for the return of the canoe; from Keola, who told how she had spent the nights sighing and without sleep; and from Le Moan, who had seen her last, seen her wandering on the beach beneath the great cliff where the stone

, wandering and sighing, the sea wind blowing her areu. That was four months ago, and that after-oon came the great squall that raised the sea on hat beach till the old blow-holes that never spoke owadays spouted.

"The sea has taken her," said Le Moan; "nothing f her remains nor will be seen again."

Slade absorbed all these details and more, took hem in, just as a stunned man takes in the air he ill breathes.

He was done with life, yet he remained living. Ie even carried on his business as of old, and in uch a way that the people around him began to rget his affection for Mircami, and those that emembered it, came to the conclusion that his ve for her could not have been great.

But Pari was not one of these.

Slade had saved him from Vana Vana, and his ffection for Slade gave him eyes to see the truth. ari had a limited mind, but he would have des-ended into hell for the sake of Slade.

He made this trouble his own, his mind cast about ere and there in the business as a dog casts about search of game.

Dakea, he knew, had been in love with Mircami efore Slade had captured her. Could it be that akea had killed her and not the sea? It was a ream that had put this idea into the head of Pari. akea was a tender-hearted, almost childish person, ncapable of injuring anyone, but this dream had een very definite, for in it he had seen Dakea with a atchet in his hand, and in his other hand the red ell necklace that Slade had given the girl.

So the evil thought came into the head of Pari hat Dakea, pressing his love on Mircami after

Slade's departure, had been repulsed by her and ha killed her.

The idea was helped by the fact that a chang had come upon Dakea. He chose, these days, t be alone as much as possible, and if you were to ca him suddenly by name he would start like a guilt man, and look at you with fright in his eyes: als at night he would go into the woods, no man kne where.

One day Pari, who was nothing if not direc took Dakea aside and charged him right out wit the killing of Mircami, and Dakea showed n anger.

"I have not killed her," said he, "nor do I kno how she died; but this I know, her spirit haun the spot where he and she in the old days used t meet, and where, peeping through the trees, I hav seen them sitting hand in hand. It is the plac on the cliff where the great stone is that fronts th sea; ask any man here and he will tell you the sam though he will not speak of it unless asked. No on will go near the spot now, even in the daytime- Timai has seen her, and others."

"And you have seen her?" said Pari.

"I have seen her spirit, white as the glint of th wave that breaks on the reef, or the cloud tha passes and is gone."

Pari considered deeply on this matter. He wa brave, but to face the darkness of the woods a night was beyond him. The thing called him, fo Mircami was, as one might say, part of Slade, an her unhappy spirit was without doubt seeking fo him. He could not go by night to speak with i yet he had courage to go at full noon, creeping softl up through the trees to see what might be seen.

CHAPTER VIII

EXT day at noon Slade was leaving his house for e beach when out from the trees stepped Pari.

"Talea," said Pari, using the name by which ade was known; "much have we been together d many things have we undergone; your heart my heart, and that which strikes Talea strikes ri. There is still before us that which must be ced, even as we faced the great reef. Talea, ircami waits for you."

Slade drew back.

"By night her spirit waits where the great Man one watches the sea and by day it waits in the oves. Follow me, Talea."

He turned and vanished amongst the trees, Slade llowing him, confused, filled with the vaguest and ildest imaginings.

He climbed, following Pari, who went before him, vift and noiseless as a shadow, through the gloom the trees, under the ever-leafless casuarinas, rough the palm-belt where the light came broken y the dancing fronds, through the cane-belt and e last of the sandals, up and up towards the place here he and she had so often met.

Here Pari, pausing and holding up his hand, drew ide the great leaves of a low-growing tree and evealed the ghostly form of a woman lying in the vilight, her face upon her arms—asleep.

It was Mircami.

Mircami, not dead, but sleeping. Mircami who ad vanished from the village and her people to live n solitude, alone with the memory of the man she oved.

And this was told to Slade by the bunch of feis

which she had plucked for food and which lay clo to her in the leaf shadows.

He stood for a moment, just for as long as a ma may exist without breathing after having drawn long breath.

Then he withdrew, stepping backward and leadi Pari by the arm, holding him and leading him t they reached the great stone that faced the sea.

Here Slade fell on his knees, his eyes were close his lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Pari watched.

Then after a little Slade rose up and stood looki about him, as though he found himself in a stran world; he laughed and spoke to himself, and the turning to the other:

"Pari," said he, "she is not dead, but were I wake her she would die. You must go to her a wake her and say: 'Talea is not dead, we have co back, he and I, and he waits you in the village Then little by little the truth will come to h which would kill her were it to come at once."

Pari did not answer, he stood with his hea lowered looking at the ground.

For him she was dead and a ghost; he had n dared to give her more than a glance, he had n seen the feis, his mind was not as the mind of Slad he could not put things together. Mircami w dead, the people had said so. Dakea had seen h ghost, and he, Pari, had seen it, discovered i hiding place and led Slade to it, so that Slade migh speak with it and give it rest, and perhaps find re himself. When the father of Tomai was drowne his spirit haunted the beach beyond the black rock and all went badly with Tomai till he met the spi and talked to it and got instructions what to do

e matter of the great fish trap which Tomai's
other claimed. When the dead come back they
ve need of speech with the living.

That was all very well in theory—but to speak
th the dead—ay, that was beyond him, and the
ct of Mircami's death was with him a fixed idea.
e would rather die than do this thing.

He stood with his head hung down, his dim soul
ruggling with itself, in confusion, all astray.

All astray, till the beach at Vana Vana came clear
fore his eyes, and the bearded ship's captain who
ould not take him, and the face of Slade as he stood
lking to the captain and refusing to go, leaving
ri behind.

Then suddenly, and as if breaking from a spell,
rowing fear aside, yet with a face grey as ashes,
made for the trees.

* * * * * *

Even still, and though he sees her with his eyes
ing in happiness with Talea, there lurks in the
ind of Pari a suspicion that Mircami is not as other
omen; that, though living, she came back from the
ad, and in this he is profoundly right—though not
the way he imagines.

KARAN

KARAN

CHAPTER I

MURRAY, coming out to Singapore, had met Van Heyut on the *Princess Juliana*. Van Heyut was a big, mild-mannered, persuasive and prosperous-looking Dutchman. One of the features of his face was a cigar, and of his conversation, when speaking the English tongue, the expression: "Now, I'll tell you."

"Now I'll tell you," said Van Heyut, as they stood on the spar deck after dinner one night, 'Singapore is no good to you, no good to you at all. It is not new enough; for a settled business, yes, but for a man who is making out on his own affairs, no, no—no good at all. Come down to Timor. That is the place for you. We are growing coconut trees; a coconut tree is like a cow, it gives milk, but unlike a cow it does not want food; unlike a cow it gives also copra, which is the inside of a coconut dried in the sun, but it is much more than the inside of a coconut dried in the sun, it is the great desire of the soap companies, for it contains a natural fat and the Klein Brothers and the Fifth National Oil Company and Boerhavers, all these pay dollars for it. Now I'll tell you, there is land of my own I would let or sell you not far from Koepang where the trees are in production. Timor is a long island, part Portuguese, part Dutch, and the Dutch half isn't the worst."

Van Heyut laughed as he finished, tipping his cigar ash over the rail into the sea.

Cape Gardafui was far behind and the starlit

foam of the Indian Ocean lay behind the *Princess Juliana* like a ghostly road homeward-leading, but to be trodden by no man.

"Thanks," said Murray. "If I don't like Singapore, I'll remember what you say."

In the result he didn't like it.

Singapore has a special brand of heat all its own, or so it seemed to Murray, also the man he had come out to see with a view to starting in business disappointed him. Calmeyer in England seemed quite a different person from the same individual out here, and a half-hinted warning to have nothing to do with Calmeyer, received from a rubber man in the bar of the hotel, completed the matter.

At a loose end, not knowing what to do, the memory of Van Heyut arose before him. Why not try Timor?

He saw at once the truth of the Dutchman's words. Singapore was too old and settled a place for a man fresh from Europe and with a small capital to do much good in, it was expensive, full of sharks and, over and above all, he disliked the place——Why not try Timor?

Murray was a man of impulse.

Packing his traps and taking a Dutch boat, he reached Koepang and, from Koepang, a small coastal steamer took him to the Ortang River, and the home of Van Heyut—and Paradise.

The broad slowly-flowing tidal river, the trees mirroring themselves in the water, the coloured birds, the peace that spoke nothing of tropic storms, the azure sky that told nothing of the rains—here was Paradise, and the white-washed bungalow of the Dutchman, and the welcome extended by the latter detracted nothing from the general impression of that place.

"Now I'll tell you, this is good," said Van Heyut, with the air of a father greeting a lost son. "You will stay with me and I will show you all my place, and the land adjoining—you will see the trees for yourself, and the chance for a young man who, with a little capital, may reach out."

Murray stayed with Van Heyut in the white bungalow, and was shown all the place and the land adjoining, and the trees. And, before a fortnight was out, he had bought, investing half his capital, a stretch of land adjoining that in cultivation by the other. On the near edge of this land Van Heyut put him up a bungalow—at a price. The two bungalows were less than half a lime apart, "so we will be companions," said Van Heyut.

And they were.

The Dutchman engaged him servants, Java boys, turbaned, silent, yellow, ever ready to oblige, yet seeming beings from another planet; along this river there were strange people, not natives of Timor but descendants of Sea Dyaks, strayed here in the long ago; one of these, an old man named Timara, looked after the boat which Murray bought for pleasure trips, and which he kept at a little landing-stage opposite his house, but Timara, though a good and willing boatman, was, like the Java servants, seemingly from another planet.

For company's sake, Murray often went over to the Dutchman's of an evening, and they would smoke and play cribbage, Van Heyut generally winning. This man was good at games and, after some months, Murray began to wonder what his real game was in life.

He grew coconut trees for copra, but he was often absent at Koepang and had strange people to

visit him, Portuguese men with rings in their ears and Malays with whom he seemed quite familiar, people who seemed unconnected with the peaceful business of copra growing.

One day Murray, going down to Koepang, met in with a Yankee who, on hearing Van Heyut's name, spat.

"That bum," said the Yank, "don't you have nothing to do with him, he's in with all the shore-along crowd; opium, stolen pearls, women and whatnot. Trees—sold you trees?—well, he's sold you, anyhow. Round here is no use for copra, yes, the coconut trees are there but they're bad bearing. He's done you and you could get your money back in the courts, but don't try. Swallow your gruel and get out. Why? Why, he'd knife you or get one of his crowd to do the trick, or have you given a dose of poison, that's why."

Murray could not believe this and said so.

"Maybe," replied the Yank, "but you'll come to believe a lot if you stay long beside that chap. He'll suck you dry and, when he's done with you and you show signs of squealing—they'll find you in the river. Whatever you do, don't show signs of suspecting him, pretend to be a fool—though maybe you don't want much pretence, and, when you see I'm in the right, clear out."

All of which Murray absorbed, rejecting naturally the flamboyant suggestions of assassination, yet somehow not so sure in his mind as to their negligibility. The fact is that, though Van Heyut had seemed a good fellow on board ship, he had never quite cottoned to him; though he had been most friendly during the last few months, the two men had never quite become companions.

It seemed as if there was a barrier between them
at could not be crossed.

There was, and Murray discovered it not long
ter the Yankee had given him warning. Van
eyut was a rogue. The land purchased from him
as not worth one-tenth the price paid for it, copra
st here was a useless proposition, for though some
ees bore well, palm did not flourish on that low
d, on top of this, the Dutchman had done him
over the building of the bungalow, over the
ection of the little landing stage for the boat,
er this and over that, including the price of pro-
sions, for Van Heyut out of the goodness of his
art, had consented to supply the newcomer with
od, drink and tobacco "at the same price what I
y myself in Koepang to the wholesalers."

Van Heyut had robbed him in large things and in
tle, the evidence was patent and Murray was the
an to strike.

Yet he held his hand.

A row with the other, leaving aside all that fan-
stic talk of assassination, was impossible.

Life on the river would be impossible without
nother white man within reach. Though he only
ent over to the Dutchman's now and again these
ys, he knew he could go when he wanted to, and
at was everything.

It didn't matter that Van Heyut was a swindler,
least the fact did not detract from the truth
at he was a white man.

You will know exactly how Murray felt in this
atter if you have ever spent a night alone in a
use suspected of being haunted. This place was,
fact, haunted by the ghost of Asia, the strange
en spirit one glimpses in fancy, now peeping

from an imperturbable yellow face, that one hea
in reality beating a gong amidst the hills and wood
that one smells in the odour of champak flowe
and burning prayer-papers.

If Murray had been dropped in the moon amid
intelligent and reasonable Selenites, he would n
have been much more out of place than here on t
Ortang River, and his crave for an Earthian perha
not stronger than his crave for a European here.

I don't know of any book that stresses this effe
of the East on the lonely Westerner, this weste
sickness with all its power and poignancy. It w
enough to keep Murray from a break with Va
Heyut for the moment. He said to himself: "Ye
I'll go for him and make him disgorge—but n
just yet." All the same, at heart he knew that h
had not the money, time or disposition to figh
this matter out in the Dutch Courts. He said t
himself: "I will stick here and advertise, and be o
the look-out for something else."

He found something else a few days later, but
was not what he was looking for.

CHAPTER II

THE boat that he kept tied up to the little landing
stage had a mast and sail, and the river was broa
enough just here to enable him to beat against th
wind when it was blowing down stream.

One day, rounding a sharp little cape above an
beyond his land, he came on an empty canoe
evidently at anchor.

Less than half a minute elapsed between hi
sighting this canoe and the moment when, glidin
up to it, he placed his hand on the gunnel.

Looking over, he saw someone in the water, some-
ıe scrabbling about on the river bed. It was a girl.
Next moment she rose as a bubble rises, clutched
ıe opposite canoe gunnel with her right hand and
ssed the wet hair aside from her eyes with the
ft, which held two huge mussels.

As she tossed the hair back from her eyes, it was
though to see Murray more clearly; she had risen
r air, but it was almost as though she had risen to
ok at him, a Naiad of the east, drawn from her
ver by a man.

The girl was sinewy and lithe, very young, almost
ımature, with perfect teeth and eyes deep and
ark, and forthright-looking as the eyes of a warrior.
She was the most fascinating creature that he had
ver come across, belonging evidently to the same
ibe as Timara and, as he soon found, speaking the
ıme tongue. She cast the mussels in the bottom
the canoe, then after a word of greeting and
ith a backward look at him, she dived again.

It was the backward glance that did for Murray.
He hung on, waiting for her reappearance, watch-
ıg her as one might watch a fish beneath the water.
When she came up he spoke to her again, and she
ung on to the canoe whilst they talked.

He had picked up a good deal from Timara, and
is wonderful how few words are necessary to make
ıeself understood in any language, especially when
ıe is helped out by that oldest language in the
orld, the language of a man with a maid.

Her name was Karan, daughter of Tubai, and
ıe was gathering mussels on the chance of finding
earls in them.

She could not tell him this because they had no
ommon word for pearls, but she showed him.

She came leg over gunnel on board the canc without upsetting it. Naked, except for a wais cloth, she crouched, all dripping, beside the litt heap of mussels already gathered, and began openin them with a knife whose blade was only two inche long. The tenth mussel gave up a small pear irregular in shape and of little value, worth onl maybe a couple of dollars. She held it in the palr of her hand and looked up at him, and he took th fingers of the outstretched hand and held them fc a moment, as he looked at the pearl.

There was nothing in any of the other mussel this wretched find for which a Chink would probabl give her half a dollar was the sole result of he fishing, yet she seemed content.

When she pulled up her anchor, he accompanie her in his boat up-stream for a quarter of a mile t where a few palmetto-thatched roofs showed amids the tree-ferns; casuarina trees and a great flame tre grew near the palmetto-thatched roofs, and ther was a little bamboo landing-stage to which an empt canoe was moored. This was her home.

He watched her land and tie up, and as she wen off amidst the trees she looked back at him.

He met her again next day and the followin night, just as the fireflies were beginning their danc and, as he stood on his landing-stage in obedienc to a half-spoken assignation, a canoe came down stream, silent and followed by a water trickle, like swimming vole, a paddle flashed and it came to th landing-stage. A moment later she was in his arms gasping, and clinging to him like a drowning creature

And they had never spoken a word of love.

It was collision. The dashing together of two being drawn by a force resistless as the power of gravity.

CHAPTER III

r was as though they had been making towards ach other for all time, she by way of the forests nd the rivers of the east, he by all the complicated oads that have made up the track of Western ivilization.

And this was indeed so, fortunate or unfortunate s the result might be.

Now Murray, the descendant of a hard and straight-ving race of men, was not the man for this sort of hing, or at least what they would call in the East this sort of thing."

He had very strict ideas as to the relationship etween men and women, ideas moreover, so set nd stable that a geographical fact left them quite nshaken.

He married Karan. Did it with an old broken-lown Dutch missionary who had left the missionary usiness and gone in for other business in Koepang. The whole thing was legally a farce, but it was the est thing he could do. He could not bring Karan nto Koepang for a civil marriage, and, as she elonged to no religion, he could not bring a parson ut to his plantation. It was the best he could do, nd he did it to satisfy something that demanded atisfaction in this business—Respectability or Con-ention, to give it its other name.

He loved Karan, his whole soul had gone out to er, he would love her for ever, so he told himself, nd whilst that love lasted he would never leave er. All the same, strong as the splice was, he ad it overlaid as best he could by Andreas Tergou, he missionary, at a fee of ten guelders and, when Tergou had departed, felt eased in mind.

He had done the right thing.

Van Heyut, when he was told about this business, laughed. Then he came over to see the newly-wed couple and approved of Karan, evidently, to judge by his manner and his eye. He questioned her, asked how it was that he had never seen her before as he knew all the river people for five miles up and down, and she replied that she had only recently come to this district, she and her father, Tubai, and her little brother Kling. They had come to live with her uncle Marop, the net-maker.

"Ah, him!" said Van Heyut. "I know him."

He took his departure and, as a wedding present, sent a box of cigars, long black cigars that Karan smoked as well as her husband.

During this honeymoon Murray let drop for a moment all the plans that had been forming in his mind for the future The morning before he fell in with Karan, he had quite determined to quit Timor, leaving this land he had bought in the hands of an agent at Koepang to sell for any old song, quit and get free of Van Heyut, and the whole business.

But Karan had altered all that.

He could not take Karan along to Australia or New Zealand, he could not take her to Sumatra or Java. He could not take her to any European settlement.

Not only was she a native woman, but she was out of our civilization. A good thing to be out of, you may say, all the same, there it was. She was a river girl.

Now if I were to bring you a story of a man who had discovered and mated with a water nymph, you would say: "How absurd." Yet this is practically what Murray had done. Karan was as remote

from our civilization as any old Greek naiad, and she was a water nymph by nature.

The river was her true home, she could not be divorced from it. She would have followed him, no doubt, wherever he had led her, but he could only have led her to unhappiness, to incongruity, to disdain, maybe to death.

She would disappear of a morning into the river, and he would see her head, far out, as she swam.

It would vanish and then pop up like a duck after a long dive. She would bring him fish, big langoustes, mussels, trepang, and after a while, she brought him in her train relatives and friends.

Little Kling would tie his canoe up to the landing stage, and strange river folk would touch there, and be received by her, and he would talk to them, at first holding his distance, then more familiarly picking up their language with incredible rapidity and their ways and methods of thought.

A dispassionate observer might have said: "This man is going native." Well, he might have been right. At all events, Murray no longer felt lonely, no longer felt at a loss, or that craving for people of his own kind that had driven him into the society of Van Heyut.

As a matter of fact, these river people, alien as they were and divorced from all white methods and ways, had in them something of a finer stuff than could be found in the dough of Van Heyut, or the traders of Koepang, and beside them, the ringed Portuguese, the low Dutch and the Malays that visited the Dutchman on dubious business, were as the beasts that perish.

Going native as he might be, Murray was happy; there might be no money to be made from the copra,

but here money was of little account. He began to plant a little garden—assisted by relatives—there was fruit for the picking, and the river supplied fish.

He ceased going to Van Heyut's at night to lose money at cards, he ceased buying supplies from the Dutchman. Living in this simple manner, he no longer required a number of things, and he bought now his coffee and tobacco through Karan's uncle—at a fifth of what he had paid before.

He was quite happy, but Van Heyut was not.

CHAPTER IV

THE pumps had sucked. Murray was a dead fly and the spider was anxious to get rid of the carcase from the web, and to prepare it for new game.

Also there was Karan.

The Dutchman had been greatly taken by the first sight of Karan. The Dutchman had seen a great number of these mixed marriages that always and inevitably, had the same result—desertion by the white man.

Also he knew in his low-down mind that the native girl was "nothing," a creature to be attracted by the glint of a bracelet, the glitter of a North Pole diamond, or the ticking of a Waterbury watch. Murray gone, the land sold to him could be bought back for next to nothing, worthless as it was, to be prepared for a new customer—and Karan would be left.

One evening, Murray was coming along home and just at the moment before sunset as he was passing a dense growth where a spur of the forest came down almost to the water, something passed his head like a streak of light.

"Whit!"

On the sound he saw something vibrating on the trunk of a palm tree right before him.

It was a knife handle. The knife, coming from behind, had passed his ear and found the tree.

It was embedded an inch. A Portuguese knife, narrow-bladed, double-edged, with a ribbon of flutine down the centre of the blade.

Murray was not fool enough to hunt round for the thrower. He went home, taking the knife with him. He told Karan.

She made no demonstration of joy at his escape as a European woman might have done. She examined the knife carefully and put it on a shelf by the door of their bedroom, and went on with the work she had been at, the preparation of rice for a curry.

After all, why should she make any demonstration? A knife had been thrown at him, but it could not have hit him simply because it had not hit him. What is, is; what will be, will be. Here in Timor death is always playing about in all sorts of forms, coloured, winged, crawling, and the lightning withers and the snake strikes, at the appointed time and none other.

To Murray it seemed that she did not care much. It was the first revelation of the fact that he had mated with a being whose mental make-up was fundamentally different to his own.

He said no more on the subject.

He tried to dismiss it from his mind.

Someone had attempted his life, it might be some low-caste Portuguese or a Malay with the simple intent of robbery, it might be this or that, all the same, behind the veil of uncertainty, he saw, or fancied he saw, Van Heyut.

Van Heyut's manner had been different of late, effusive, but strained.

Why the effusion? He had stopped dealing with the Dutchman and rarely went to his house.

He remembered what the Yankee had said long ago at Koepang.

Trying to dismiss the matter from his mind was of no use, quite the reverse—as well try to dismiss sleeplessness.

Sitting alone, he would brood over the thing. It is bad to feel that one's life is wanted, that the death that comes to all men by way of nature is trying to find us by way of art, and worse is it to have to remain waiting, not knowing, unresisting and dumb.

Karan's seeming indifference to the business had put him strangely at fault. Brooding, it seemed to him that this companion, for whom he would have laid down his life, had moved away from him, that there had arisen between them a viewless barrier. He fancied, rightly or wrongly, that her manner had changed. Once he came upon her suddenly as she was seated on a mat outside the house, seated with her knees clasped by her hands, her gaze fixed on the river and her brows contracted—she seemed in angry or discontented thought. He had never seen her like that before.

One day, at the hour of siesta, looking out by chance, he saw her on the landing-stage; she was talking to someone who had pulled a canoe alongside, it was Achmat, one of Van Heyut's men, he knew Achmat well by sight, and they were talking and talking; now and then she cast a glance back at the house as though to see whether she was observed.

He did not speak about this business, but it remained in his mind.

He did not ask her.

Now, when two people live together as these two lived, alone and isolated, they talk two languages, the language of ordinary speech and the voiceless language which is made up of heaven knows what; nothing—telepathy.

Through this tongue she seemed to divine that something was wrong with Murray and through it, he, that something was on her mind.

CHAPTER V

One day, returning with her from the river, he found on the floor of the living-room a huge round shallow basket, in which lay two durian fruit.

Now the durian, beloved of the ordinary native, was never touched by the river folk, someone had left this present, then, for him and not for Karan.

But there had been three fruit in that basket. The ordinary durian is as big as a man's head, these of a smaller variety were about the size of the head of a six years' old child, yet still big and heavy enough to leave an enduring impression on the bed of leaves at the bottom of the basket.

Someone had taken the third fruit.

Whilst they were standing saying this to one another, Chaya, the girl who helped Karan in the cooking, came running in crying that Tibu was dead.

Tibu was the boy that helped Chaya to keep the place clean, who fetched water from the well and who did odd jobs.

Tibu, coming into the house and seeing the durians in their basket and knowing that he was unwatched, had fallen.

Tribes have gone to war before this over the

possession of a durian tree. Tibu did not even go to war with himself. In for a penny, in for a pound, he had seized the ripest and best of the three fruit and retired to the groves with it, taking with him a knife to cut the rind.

Twenty minutes later, just before the return of Murray and Karan, Chaya, going out to hang up a cloth to dry, found Tibu, who had crawled from the trees. He seemed paralyzed.

He held one of the great pips of the fruit in his hand. He told her what he had done, said that he was poisoned and then became convulsed.

He was dead when Murray and Karan reached him.

The thing was plain. The fruit had been poisoned and left for Murray—by whom?

By whom, indeed?

The body was placed in an outhouse, and Murray sent a servant to Koepang to acquaint the authorities, but he well knew that nothing would result from that.

On the shelf by the door of the bedroom lay the Portuguese knife that had nearly killed him, and in the grove the remains of the durian—that would have killed him, and—what next?

What would the next attempt be and with what subtle weapon?

As he sat at supper that night with Karan he asked himself this, also a more terrible question—did Karan know anything of the matter?

The change he had noticed in her for some time past was accentuated to-night. She was gloomy and distraught. Naturally the death of Tibu would affect her, but it seemed more than that, was conscience affected as well as mind?

What did he know of her really? Beyond the veil of racial difference what did there lie unknown to him?

Always in these mixed unions there is that; can two beings, poles apart racially, be absolutely joined even by the magic of love? Can they ever really understand one another?

That night, waking just before twelve, Murray found that his wife was no longer beside him.

CHAPTER VI

He could see the room vaguely through the gauze of the mosquito net; the moon was bright outside, and a ray fell through a crack on the reed curtains that hung at the open doorway.

She had left him. Why?

It was as though all the events of the past weeks had been the footprints of some monster crawling towards him, and now preparing to spring.

Van Heyut!

He saw again the bar where the Yankee had warned him against the Dutchman, he saw again the knife sticking in the palm tree, the dead body of Tibu. He saw Karan talking to Achmat. Had she left him for Van Heyut, and this man who dealt so freely and safely with death, would he repeat the attempt to-night, now——?

Oh, it was quite plain—the durian fruit had failed and she had gone to tell Van Heyut of the failure!

Her manner on coming to bed—she had not tried to put her arm round him or touch him, she had lain scarcely breathing, but surely thinking.

Suspicion, that ghost whose food can be so little —just crumbs, had suddenly a full loaf to feed on.

And he was lying there without a weapon, should any attack suddenly come.

There was nothing in the house to defend himself with—then he remembered the knife on the shelf.

It was as though Providence had armed him with the weapon that had attempted his destruction. He slipped from under the mosquito net and stood on the floor.

The dead silence of the house was broken only by the ticking of a beetle, and now from outside came a voice—the cry of a right-fishing hawk. He came to the shelf—the knife was gone!

He ran the palm of his hand all along the shelf—it was gone. He could not remember when he had seen it there last, but the fact remained, it was there no longer. Had she taken it? Deprived him of his only weapon?

He stood trying to think.

There were knives, ordinary dinner knives in the drawer of the table in the next room, useless things. Then he remembered something else and, going to a box in the corner of the room, opened it.

It contained a lot of old truck and, amongst the rest, an obsidian spear-head, with a bit of the shaft attached. A South Sea weapon he had picked up as a curiosity at Koepang, a thing brittle as glass keen as a razor.

With this he went back, got under the mosquito net, and lay down.

He lay on his back with the thing in his right hand, and the light quilt leaving his striking arm free.

The moon drifted, the light left the reed curtain and touched the wall, but he could see through the reed curtain a glimmer showing the next room.

The weapon in his hand gave him assurance.

After all, it was unlikely that Van Heyut would make a direct attack, there were so many indirect ways of dealing out death in Timor that he would scarcely risk coming himself to do an open job or trusting it to a subordinate.

Still—who could tell?

Time passed. Once he dropped off to sleep for a moment, awaking again with a start—then again he dropped off for a longer time. How long he could not tell, it might have been an hour, half an hour or a quarter, but when he awoke someone was just in the act of slipping in beside him on the left-hand side, and before he could fully realize what was happening an arm came round him, caressing him, and a soft, contented sigh sounded in his ear.

It was Karan. He could feel the bangle on the arm and smell the curious sweet perfume of her hair.

She thought he was asleep.

Then he felt her move and her lips pressed against his cheek in a kiss, then she sank down again with a sigh of contentment. He lay for a while breathing as though he were asleep, cursing himself for a fool and a traitor for his suspicions of this creature who loved him. Then, after a while, rousing as if from sleep, he managed to slip the spear-head beneath the mattress, so that she would know nothing of it.

Then he turned and, putting his arm round her, embraced her. Her lips met his.

* * * * * *

She rose first in the morning, and when he was alone, he put the spear-head away in the box, it seemed part of the wrong he had done her, he would have destroyed it if he could.

He heard her singing outside. She had not sung like that for a long time and at breakfast, as she sat opposite to him, she seemed a new creature, as though some weight, that had long oppressed her, had been removed from her mind.

It was not till noon that the Dutch police inspector from Koepang came to view the body of Tibu and hear the story. He explained that he had been delayed at Van Heyut's plantation. The Dutchman had been found lying on the floor of his bedroom, stabbed to the heart that morning. And, oh, the character that Dutch policeman gave of the dead man!

"He was a wasp—well, they get stung sometimes. It was some woman, no doubt—always with him it was women; well, the Customs could never get him nor the opium laws. Well, well, it comes to them all like that in their time."

And Murray, when the other had departed in his motor-launch, came back slowly to the house full of thought. He came to the shelf in the bedroom—he had not thought of examining it that morning—the knife was there!

He took it down and examined it carefully—nothing—but the long, narrow, cruel blade looked bright, as though recently cleaned.

As he put it back, the everyday sounds of the house came to him, the sounds of Chaya grinding something in a pestle and mortar for one of her eternal curries, the sound of Kiku beating a mat, and now and then a snatch of song from Karan as she worked, sweet as the song of the bell-bird in the casuarinas.

THE PEARL THAT CAME HOME

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FOREWORD

"For tragedy in her serious or comic guise
search the history of gems."

THE other day in London the Southern Star, one of the largest, and certainly the most beautiful, of the world's diamonds, was put up for auction and "failed to realize any price." I forget what the bidding went to, nor does the amount matter, beyond the statement that it was absurdly small.

The stone was too big. Too big to be worn in an ordinary way. Big diamonds are out of fashion, and this everlasting crystal, holding in it the beauty and soul of sunrise, was turned down.

This is not a treatise on jewellery, else, leaving the Southern Star aside, I would quote many instances of lovely gems neglected, left in obscurity by Taste and only picked up at the dictates of fashion or vice-versa. The black pearl that was worth little till the Empress Eugenie made it sought after, the drop pearl that was worth much till women gave up wearing drop earrings, the opal that went out of favour less on account of superstition than Fad; a list long as the list of poets, painters, writers and sculptors, the intrinsic beauty of whose work was worth nothing till revealed by the eyes of some critic-seer.

This is the story of a pearl that came home, came at last to be appreciated for its beauty alone, by a mind that knew nothing of its worth in the market-place.

CHAPTER I

THE Sulu archipelago, lying to the north of Borneo, contains over 150 small islands, and the most beautiful pearls in the world have come from here. There is something in the water of the tropic seas that lends colour to the coral, and special beauty to the pearl and, of all the seas, the sea of Sulu is most highly charged with this dynamic something that finds expression in beauty.

It was in 1882, when the old Sultan of Sulu was fighting the Spaniards, the same Sultan who sold his rights in the great birds' nests caves to the North Borneo Company, that Fleming, who had got hold of an old prahu and the service of a Sulu man, whose name sounded like Nakardike, was fishing for pearls—illicitly. He had come in through the southern Sibutu passage and worked up as far as Cagayan Sulu, and it was amidst the tiny islets north of here, and in view of the palms of Cagyan, that he was doing his fishing.

Now, if you will look at the charts or at any large map, you will see that Sulu waters are almost as much enclosed as Tidal Basin. Five hundred miles by five hundred miles, they are hedged from the South China Sea by Palawan, from the Celebes Sea by Sibuguey and all the islands to Tawi-Tawi, from the Pacific by the Phillipines, a vast blue basin, where the shark shared kingdom with an emperor who impaled men for pearling without a permit. Facts that did not in the least disturb Fleming in his fishing.

War prahus might break the horizon at any moment, or a boatful of Spaniards come along—men worse than the men of Sulu—it did not matter,

t was all in the day's work. No law ran in these seas to save a lawless man from extreme punishment; t did not matter, only in the lawless seas could Fleming do his job—which was plunder in all its forms from opium smuggling to barratry. Broken n his last deal with the customs, he had come down to the Celebes and, with the profit of a lucky gamble at Mendao, bought the fishing prahu and provisions for three men for four months—also the services of Nakardike and a Malay boy, Achmat.

A week ago, here, within sight of Cagyan, they had struck oyster ground and coach whip fucus in six-fathom water, taking in six days three hundred pair of shells and ten pearls, six almost worthless, the others, at the prices ruling in those days, varying in value from five to twenty pounds apiece.

This evening, an hour before sunset, Fleming came on the great find.

Opening the last oyster of the take, a thing nearly as big as a soup plate, he saw a bulge on the flesh near the hinge of the shell; dividing the muscle, he squeezed gently and, like a great white bubble, out came a pearl. It was enormous; weighing maybe a hundred grains and absolutely round, luminous, and perfect.

Holding it in the palm of his wet and dirty hand, Fleming looked at it. Behind him Nakardike, naked as the new-moon and dripping from his last dive, stood gazing down at it, Achmat, squatting on the deck near by, gazed too, and at the kriss which Nakardike had picked up from the deck, where lay his loin cloth and betel box.

A passing gull cried out at them, the only sound breaking the silence of that sea, stretching in the sunset towards the palms of Cagyan and the Sibitu passage.

Here was all Fleming wanted. He was up in pearls.

He had gained his knowledge from Chi Loo, the opium middleman who dealt in pearls as well as opium and who dwelt in Hankow. It was Chi Loo who had given him the tip about Sulu waters. This thing would be worth a small fortune in the open market, for a perfectly round pearl above fifty grams is of the greatest rarity; and, as Fleming looked at it after the first realization of its value, he did not see it, or only as the nucleus of a crowded picture wherein figured Chi Loo, to whom he would offer it for sale, the bars of Hankow and Formosa, where he would cut a dash, girls, champagne bottles——

Nakardike, looking down, saw the Sultan of Sulu, who impaled men for illicit pearling. Saw also a house on stilts near the Itang river where he could live in comfort with a brown wife and unlimited credit at the Traders; saw also, that the moment had come.

Unknown to Fleming stood the terrible fact that this expedition—though paid for by him, was entirely Nakardike's.

Nakardike was not the person to risk the anger of the Sultan for a few dollars a month's wages. He had come with a cut-and-dried plan to be put in operation directly the pearl takings were worth the trouble of seizing, and not a moment later, seeing the danger of lingering in these prohibited waters. The moment had come, and the blow of the kriss that nearly severed Fleming's head left nothing to be desired in the way of vigour and directness.

Nakardike seized the pearl, pouched it, and helped Achmat to throw the body overboard.

CHAPTER II

Now, the Spaniards at that time had several gunboats lying by their fortified settlement, Jalo, and the smallest of these, the *Seville*, a hundred-ton tin pot, with a beam engine and a swivel gun, steaming eight knots and captained by the gay young spark, Lieutenant Alvarez, was cruising one fine morning between Laparan Island and Cape Sandakan, when the look-out sighted a prahu.

Alvarez was down below playing the guitar and smoking. He came on deck. The fools on the prahu had altered their course, which was as good as saying "chase me," and the *Seville* asked nothing better, she was proud of her speed and she was aching to fire her gun. She did. She fired it in fact, twice, after the prahu had hauled her wind and surrendered.

Nakardike and Achmat received the boarders with outstretched hands spread wide open and palms up. They were innocent men, fishers who had lost their gear, natives of Timbu Mata who had no grudge against the Spanish, or leanings towards the Sultan or his troops.

"Just so," said Alvarez, who could talk the Sulu lingo, "and that?" he pointed with his toe at a bajak lying in the port scuppers.

A bajak is an oyster rake made in the likeness of a hayrake and of very heavy wood, it has a heavy stone lashed to its under part to make it run true, it is a thing quite distinctive, there is nothing else like it born of the sea, and Nakardike, like a fool, had never thought of heaving it overboard. Men do stupid things like that, especially men of the type of Nakardike and his assistant Achmat, for Providence has ordained that Murder shall always have for its

shadow Stupidity, and stupidity, what is it but sister to the callousness that permits men to commit murder?

There was also an oyster shell forgotten, there was also a stain on the deck that much scraping had not removed. A stain on the deck was nothing, it might be shark blood or what not—but why the scraping?

Now Alvarez, though only a lieutenant in the Spanish navy on duty at Jalo, was a man of parts, he could reason, using facts as counters of thought, and that is the most difficult thing in the world; also he was thorough.

CHAPTER III

WHAT followed now was most curious.

Nakardike, put through the third degree and the Spanish torture of the tarred rope, handed up the pearls, all save the great one, and had Alvarez been another man, he would have departed with the loot, satisfied with a good morning's work, but he was Alvarez and, taking Nakardike below into the dog-hole of a cabin, he felt his head like a phrenologist—finding not only the bump of acquisitiveness, but a lump which was the pearl tied up in a bit of fish-skin and bound amidst the hair so that Alvarez had to cut it loose with his pocket-knife.

He had guessed instinctively that Nakardike was holding some of the pearls back, and he had glimpsed the little lump beneath the hair, but he never expected anything like this.

Here was—fortune. Guitars, girls, bull-fights, a house in Seville, or, better, Paris—Paris! Paris! That was the place of all places. In five beats of a pendulum, such is the power of mind, he had mapped and coloured his future. He put the pearl in his pocket, no one had seen it. It was a secret

etween himself and the man of Sulu. The secret ad to be sealed. He brought Nakardike on deck.

Now this bloodhound of a man had not only cented hidden loot, but also he was convinced in his ind that a white man had been boss of the prahu, nd had been murdered for the sake of the pearl.

Two things told him of this, the stain on the deck and n old shoe lying in a corner of the dog-hole below.

Did he accuse Nakardike? Not a bit. He ordered his men to unshackle the halyard of the big ail and put the rope round Achmat's neck.

He knew that if murder had been committed, oth men were in the business, there was no accusaion; if murder had been committed, Achmat would hink that Nakardike had confessed down below, utting the blame on him (Achmat) and would try o escape by a counter-accusation. It was beautiully reasoned and swiftly done, and the result ustified the reasoning.

Achmat confessed everything, accusing Nakardike, vho confessed everything, accusing Achmat.

Alvarez hanged them both, and made a target of he prahu at five hundred yards, sinking her at the ixth shot.

Then he went back to Jalo, reported a naval ngagement in which he multiplied the prahu by ix; handed over the small pearls, said nothing about he great one, and settled down to brood and make lans for the future. His cleverness had brought im to an impassé. Up to this he had been careless nd happy; now, with fortune in his waistcoat ocket, he was discontented.

All the fun in the world was waiting for him, and e was tied to Jalo, he was on war service and could ot resign his position, he could not disclose his

treasure, he could not sell the thing in the East. He had long casual talks with Ah Wong, a Chinese trader who supplied Jalo with provisions, and Ah Wong, who knew everything about everything saleable, gave it as his opinion that, for the sale of jewels, London or Paris were the only markets. Unless indeed, one could get hold of one of the native Princes of India.

But all this talk was of no use to Alvarez. He was tied to Jalo and the Sea of Sulu. There was no escape for another five years at least, and he could not wait.

One day he was ordered to take the *Seville* on a scouting expedition to the Borneo coast near Maraop.

He ran her through the Sibutu passage and piled her on a charted reef near the entrance to Darvel Bay.

The boat he escaped in ran to Timbu Matu. Here he and his men turned pirates—they were pirates anyway—licensed up to this, unlicensed now.

This piracy business was not his intention. His intention was to get to Europe with the pearl and the small amount of money he had taken with him from Jalo, but he was more or less in the hands of his men. These ruffians, seizing a big prahu and killing the owners, were like djinns he had evoked and he had to go with them and be parcel of their doings—and indeed he was a bit of a djinn himself.

Powerfully armed for those days and waters—they had taken rifles and ammunition before leaving the *Seville*—they were a match for anything they were likely to meet. But the business was frankly rotten. The small vessels they met in with could only supply them with provisions or tobacco. Once they got a bag of dollars, and once some tins of Canton opium, there was nothing in it but the gamble and the satisfaction of the plunder instinct,

nd all the time Alvarez, though steadily degrading, ept tight to his pearl and his dreams of the West. He was the only one of the lot who knew anyhing of navigation and, past Laut, he began to edge hem west into the Java sea.

They had kicked off their clothes with their ivilization, naked and brown, wearing loin cloths, nd with long hair, more terrible than the men of ulu, they were an affront to the spirit of the White Ian, and Alvarez was not the least terrible; the earl that had led him to all this he had secreted n his long hair, following the hint given him by Nakardike, and the money he had brought with him rom Jalo he had hidden beneath a plank below, gainst the time when he might be able to use it.

One day, off Banka, they sighted a small brig oming east, and the brig, sighting the prahu, altered er course; they chased, reckoning on the small ize of the prey and its timidity.

When the two vessels were within a mile of one nother, the wind failed and fell to a dead calm, nd the prahu, putting out her sweeps, crawled like venomous brown beetle across the glassy swell owards its victim.

The brig was the *Itang*, Captain Schmerder, Dutch-owned and making to Batavia from Calcutta vith a cargo of cotton goods. The prahu came right longside of her, and Alvarez and his ruffians boarded er. They had killed the captain and half the rew and driven the remains below, closing the hatch n them, when——

CHAPTER IV

ROUND the shoulder of far-off Gasper Island came he *Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*, the new Dutch gunboat

on the Batavia station, firing up for all she was worth, and with her crew rushing to stations.

It is funny to think that all these vigorous happenings had been, so to speak, lying perdu in a quiet old oyster of the Sulu sea, to be fished up, and set free by Alvarez, yet so it was and, with the pearl which was the core of them in his hair, and fighting to the bitter end, he was killed with all his men on May 16, 1882, in the last battle with pirates that took place in the Java seas.

CHAPTER V

Now what happened to the pearl?

Who discovered it in his hair and managed to secrete it and bring it to Amsterdam and sell it for eight hundred pounds—a wretched price—to Christiaan Huygens, the jeweller of the Heeren Graght? I am not going to say. To be honest, I don't know.

It is enough that Huygens sold it for twice the amount to Knepeller of the Rue de la Paix in Paris, who sold it to Prince Muroff, who gave it to Margaret Stein at a luncheon at the Café de Paris, who, wishing to emulate Cleopatra, called for a glass of vinegar to dissolve it in. Learning its value from the Prince, she put it in her pocket instead.

It was in a little red morocco case and undrilled as yet, and she took it home and forgot it. That seems to you impossible, which proves that you do not know the mentality of Margaret Stein and her tribe. Stolen by Rosalie, her maid, it passed into the possession of M. Bourgeois at a price which permitted Rosalie to set up a bonnet shop in the Rue du Mont Thabor, and if you passed that shop with a friend and said to him: "Look, that business came out of an oyster that lived in the sea of Sulu,"

he would not have believed you, nor would he have believed the same statement made concerning the splendid new café which M. Bourgeois opened that same year in the Rue St., Honore.

CHAPTER VI

In those times, just as all good defunct Americans go to Paris, all good jewels went at last to Russia—or nearly all. It was a question of price.

It came to Russia. It had been badly drilled in Paris, a small fraction of an inch out of the true, so it wouldn't hang properly if strung on a necklace, it had to be worn by itself on a thin chain. When Princess Anakoff opened the little box on her birthday she cried: "Oh, what a size!" Then, when she heard of the drilling, and that it could not be made the foundation of a new necklace she pouted, made a scene, and the Prince, who was a Minister of State, flew into "one of his tempers," tried to throw the thing out of the window, broke a vase, and went off to attend to his official duties in a condition of mind that left its small but ineradicable mark on the future history of Russia.

The pearl was locked away with other discarded jewels. It had been the innocent cause of a lot of dark work, it had killed Alvarez and his men, incited the spirit of thievery in the hearts of more than a few, and now it was out of harm's way, or out of men's way, which amounts to the same thing. Out of the way and securely locked up in a safe made by Borodinski—the Griffiths of Russia—and in the company of some musty old documents, the title deeds of houses in Paris and Vienna, and some miniatures of the early Anakoffs, done by Poushkin.

Also there was a watch by Lépine, a few jade orna-

ments, and a huge turquoise that had come across the Urals in a tartar's cap in the time of Attila.

Wonderful stories that turquoise could have told had it possessed memory and a tongue. Possessing neither, it was dumb—as was the Pearl.

Years passed.

Once the door of the safe was flung open, and a madly laughing woman seized the documents and flung them about on the floor, and then, with one of them, struck a bearded man on the face, who, in a rage, struck at her and missed, whilst another man, pale and thin, and dressed in black and seeming moved by sudden fury, drew an ivory-handled revolver from his breast pocket and shot the bearded man, so that he fell face down on the floor, flinging up his arms as he fell.

Then the documents were shot back into the safe and the smoking revolver with them, and the door was shut, and the pearl and its companions found themselves in darkness and silence again after this momentary glimpse of the strange world that surrounded them.

For a long time nothing happened, how long who knows—years, during which the documents were evidently uncalled for like the jewels, and then, one night, the doors of the safe flew open to the beating of drums and cries and shrieks and flare of torches from the street on which the room opened, and a white-haired woman was gathering everything in a pillow-slip: documents, pearl, jade ornaments and all.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT thing, after many weeks, a blaze of light, and the pearl was in the hands of Ben Oued, the jeweller of Constantinople.

Then, in a few weeks, it was in London in the office of Romanes, the dealer, and a thick-nosed elderly man with a flower in his coat was saying:

"I would like to buy something for my wife, something of character. Diamonds, no, she has all she wants—ah, let us look at that pearl—badly pierced, worth very little!"

"Pearls are jumping every day, Mr. Gunderman," said Romanes, filling a glass with water and putting the pearl in the water where it instantly and almost completely vanished from sight, thus proving its worth. Then he weighed it in a little scales, then he put it back on its chain.

"How much?" asked Gunderman.

* * * * * *

Two hours later the new purchaser came back to the Savoy Hotel, where he was staying. Mrs. Gunderman was having afternoon tea at a little table in the dance room. She was stout and florid, and when he gave her his present, and she opened the box and saw the great pearl on its little chain, she thought from its size that it was false, also it was on a two-penny-halfpenny looking little chain.

"It's platinum," said he, referring to the chain, then he told her the price he had paid, and she lost her temper. She had set her mind lately on emeralds, she had said nothing on the matter to him but, subconsciously and half consciously, she had been turning towards emeralds, and now this thing, which did not appeal to her at all—and at such a price!

He told her that pearls were increasing in value, that they were jumping every day.

But the activity of pearls did not interest her. She said not a word about emeralds, but she frankly told him he had been "done." She had to say

something nasty and, unconsciously, she said the thing that would hurt him most, reflecting as it did on his business capacity.

The accusation of doing a man (within the limits of the law) would have been something of a compliment, but to accuse him of being done—well!

Flying into a temper, he left her and sought solace in the American bar.

Then, when they came down to dinner at half-past seven, he found she was wearing the pearl as a sort of make-up to him. He had recovered his temper and, as he sat opposite to her during the meal, his eyes travelled about the room.

"You don't know how well that pearl looks, Sarah," said he. "It's a new idea wearing one strung like that, look at all those women and their pearl necklaces and not one genuine, I bet; you see they make them now so good you can't tell the difference. But that thing tells itself for genuine at once, because no one would wear an imitation alone like that."

"I suppose so," said she, without disclosing the fact that she had quite made up her mind to get him to sell the thing and purchase the emeralds she now acutely longed for.

"I must get it insured to-morrow," he went on. "It will go in with the rest of your things at Lloyds." He took a gold cigarette case from his pocket and gave her a cigarette, then he lit up, and a little later they stepped into their limousine and were driven a hundred yards away to the Strand Theatre.

Here under the influence of the genius of Berry they forgot everything for a couple of hours, returning to the Savoy and their suite where Gunderman was just in the act of pouring himself out a whisky and soda when his eyes became fixed on his wife.

"Where's the pearl?" he asked.

It was gone.

The platinum chain was there, but the pearl was gone.

Everything was there, even the little platinum wire that had pierced the thing. The wire had broken, that was all.

Like demented creatures they ran about the room searching the carpet, under the chairs, everywhere. He examined her dress, shaking out the folds—nothing.

Bidding her stay where she was, lest by some chance it might be stuck somewhere in her clothes, he came out in the corridor hunting along to the lift, rang up the lift, searched its floor and came down in it.

Burst out of it like a bombshell, calling to the attendants to help in the search.

"A pearl, a big, round pearl. I gave a large sum for it to-day, it's gone. One hundred pounds to whoever finds it!"

But it was not to be found.

Out in Savoy Court you might have seen men who seemed hunting for mushrooms by lamp light—a quest that would have been just as fruitful. It was gone. And it was not insured.

CHAPTER VIII

PATRICK SWEENY, aged thirteen and a bit, yet not looking it, being stunted by environment and heredity, was coming to the end of a perfect day.

He had played truant from school, earned sixpence by taking a message for a shady-looking man to a shady public-house, which message had caused two other shady-looking gentlemen to arise and go

forth in a hurry, only to fall into the arms of the police, fished for sharks with a bent pin—till chivvied away by the police from the landing-stage near Cleopatra's needle, seen a corpse being brought ashore at Westminster Bridge, received, after an hour's vigil outside the tobacco shop close to Charing Cross underground station, two cigarette cards, one telling the history of the Gloire de Dijon Rose and the other the history of the Discobolus, both illustrated, stuffed himself with gum drops and two saveloys, and seen a dog run over.

That was all mixed and good and brought him to lighting-up time and the news of the day exhibited by the *Morning Post* sky signs. Here he learned that Trojan had won at Kempton Park and that Mussolini had sent a message to the League of Nations, and that Lloyd George was suffering from a chill at Churt.

Divided between Fleet Street and the West he chose the latter and was rewarded by a taxi-cab accident at Piccadilly Circus.

Theatre turning-out time found him now in the Strand, and coming along by the Strand Theatre, the eyes that took in everything in heaven and earth and on the pavement, saw a big white bead which was promptly pouched, also a cigarette end that lay a little further on, which he stick in his mouth and lit with a mouldy old match found after much searching.

Then came the thought of Home, and Cassidy's Rents.

CHAPTER IX

CASSIDY'S RENTS were not closed for the night, in fact, when he arrived, Billy Mechan, a person of

his own age, was just arriving home from the Opera —at least from in front of the opera house in Covent Garden, where he had had no luck, and Pat's mother had only just gone to bed in the room which his father, his mother, himself and little Noreen called their home.

The door was on the latch—they are all honest people there—anyhow, there's nothing to steal—and the elders in bed were asleep and snoring like two people chloroformed and taking the anæsthetic badly. But Noreen, eleven years old, in the rag-bed on the floor near the window, was not asleep.

A wee white face showed in the moonlight. She was half sitting up on her elbow. She had been waiting for Pat, he generally brought her something and, as he took off his old boots before getting into bed beside her fully dressed as he was, the whisper came in the moonlight: "What 'a ye got me?" Followed by the answer: "Cards—and them," he put the dirty paper bag holding three last gum-drops in her hand. Then he remembered the bead and handed it to her.

It made her forget the gum-drops.

It looked beautiful in the moonlight, it was like a little vague lamp and it held the sick child, for she was very sick, so that she forgot to ask for the cards and he forgot them, too, for he was in bed beside her now, snuggling down under the old quilt, and almost at once he was sleeping a sleep that many a rich man would have bought at a pound a minute.

Not only did the bead look like nothing else, but it felt like nothing else, so smooth and friendly and warm. She noticed the little hole in it, and guessed it was meant to put on a string, but she did not want

it on a string, she only wanted to hold this lovely bead and look at it and turn it about and feel it.

Then the fear came to her that Pat would want it back. Pat was that sort, though good-hearted enough, he had taken back several things he had given her.

She fell asleep with it in her hand, and it was there when she awoke in the morning, her father gone to work, her mother scolding Pat, who was pulling on his boots, and the sun shining through the dirty window.

It looked even more beautiful when she had a peep at it in the daylight, when her mother's back was turned and, days later, when Mrs. Sweeny asked her: "What are you hidin' under the pillow Noreen?" the answer came, "Nothin', mummy, it's only an old bead Pat gave me, but don't tell him or he'll be wantin' it back." And I doubt if Mrs Sweeny would have taken it from her had she thought it of value, for Noreen was "going out," and when, some days later, she was gone, far let us hope from Cassidy's Rents, her grubby little hand was holding something tight—her last plaything which nobody tried to take from her—and rightly had they only known, for she was the only person who had loved the thing for its beauty and for itself.

Yet, all the same, true to the history of gems it was tragic—this wealth in the hand of one who had died from *tabes mesenterica*—which is one of the many Latin names doctors give to Poverty.

SAONI MAKES GOOD

SAONI MAKES GOOD

CHAPTER I

FIFTEEN years or so ago Vatava was all but free of civilization, though the seeds of civilization were there in the form of a Frenchman who had gone native; the form of a whaling captain, the last of the old dispensation, who was dying of drink in a shack on the shores of New Moon Bay; and the form of a man who called himself an artist, and who lived at the back of the island, beyond Hualiva.

To-day, a friend tells me, Vatava has a hotel and accompaniments in the way of bars; Chinks have crept there in the steps of the white man, dope in the pockets of the Chinks, and only yesterday I read a story, evidently written about the place by a writer without sense of colour, but with a fine sense of dirt.

There was nothing in it of the torrent that hangs like a trace of smoke from the cliff where the lianas cling, of the blue and patiently-beating sea greening in the shallows, and marking the reefs with lines of foam, of the golden and hyacinth dawns, and the whispering palm trees and the afternoons of summer, filled with the drowsiness and dreaminess of the Golden Age; of the rains that fill the island with their roar, from the Bay of Whales to Hualiva; of the hurricanes, when the world grows grey and

mad, bombarding the beaches with twenty-foot waves; of the miraculous weather that follows the storm, with skies more bright than diamonds and air sweet with the scent of earth and rain-washed flowers, and bruised and broken trees. Nothing of the true nature of the Polynesians that are left, a nature stormy and sunny as the weather of Vatava, child-like, sometimes childish, yet capable of rising to great heights and sinking to great depths, and doing funny things, like the thing that Saoni did, and of which I am going presently to tell you.

Nothing of all this, nothing but the doings of a native girl and a white man in an atmosphere of joss stick fumes and kerosene, with a steamer bell to ring the curtain up and the hoot of a siren to bring it down.

Modern and true to life? Yes, but Vatava is at heart neither modern nor true to life, if by modernity you mean ugliness in all things, from morals to houses and by life, the life of the cities. These things are on it like dirt smeared on a picture of Daubigny's by an ape, but they are not of it.

CHAPTER II

KEOLA and Tanta were girls living in Vatava before Bubegon spoiled the beach or the gone-native white man had arrived from the Louisades. The old whaling captain was then living in a palm-thatched shack, and Sampson was trader, his house close to the sands of New Moon Bay and within earshot of the torrent whose fumy whisper could be heard in certain states of the wind.

Keola and Tanta, like the other girls of Vatava, wore nothing to speak of, and yet were dressed. You cannot understand me unless you have seen a real Polynesian in his or her real setting. God dressed these people in sun colour and set them against a background of beauty; naked they were, but with the nudity of apples on a tree, offensive to none but the impure-minded.

They lived in the native village by New Moon Bay, the village that has been partly pushed back to give room for the new hotel and partly absorbed by the new town that has risen like a fungus crop, a town of shanties, section-built bungalows and small houses that are neither eastern nor western, a town where corrugated iron rattles to the rain of the wet season, and where Ah Chung watches you from his shop door as you come out of the "picture palace" run by Mosenheim, the German from Detroit.

The palm-thatched house where Tanta lived was situated where is now the Bay Hotel, and the house of Keola, daughter of Pari, where is now Soo Mai's Laundry.

The girls were fast friends.

They would bathe together, and Tanta often helped in the launching of Pari's fishing canoe, went at times on fishing expeditions beyond the reefs, and would busy herself helping the old man to look after his gear and mend his nets, ever happiest when busy.

Keola was lazy. One of those people who are born neither to toil nor to spin, yet manage to escape reproach; there are these people in every community, marked by some hidden sign, and you only know them when they have made you do their job.

Tanta was always doing jobs for Keola, taking

a hand at the pounding of the kava and so on, whilst Keola amused herself.

Amused herself by stringing beads or making garlands of flowers or by lying on her face and letting her soul wander through the crystal depths of the rock pools like a fish, or lying on her back and allowing her soul to flit in the blue above the tree-tops like a bird.

Between Tanta and Keola there was little difference in the way of good looks, yet Tanta the drudge was, if anything, prettier than Keola the butterfly, in a man's eyes, and with a man it is the "if anything" that means everything.

CHAPTER III

SAMPSON came out on his veranda one morning to find the *Northern Star* coming in to her anchorage like a swan across the almost unruffled blue of the morning sea. She was the schooner owned by Sebright and Manesman, she came to take his copra, and as she swung to her anchor and dropped a boat, he saw that old Captain Vilejon was either sick in his cabin or not on board.

That tremendous figure, over six feet in height and thick as a tree, was not there; this must be a new skipper, this white-clad figure in the stern-sheets being rowed ashore, either that or a new first mate.

He came down to the sea edge to greet the boat and gave a hand to the stranger.

"Where's Vilejon?" asked Sampson, without other word of greeting, name asked, or good-day given. "Sick?"

"Dead," said the other, "Blackwater fever, died at Vana Vana and they put me on. You're Sampson? My name's Travers. Well, you're not badly placed here, are you?"

He glanced about him at the beauty of the trees and the white curved beach and the pleasant-looking crowd of Kanakas that had trickled down to greet the ship. Nari, the mat-maker, Taipi, Susini, Pari, the fisherman, Keola, with her garland of flowers and Tanta, wide-eyed, and just back from an all-night fishing trip beyond the reef, and as he looked about him, Sampson took him in.

Travers wasn't more than thirty, a man with a clipped brown beard and blue sunny eyes, pleasant to look at, a very different figure from Vilejon.

They went up to the house for breakfast and the crowd, having fraternised for a while with the Kanaka boat crew, dispersed, all but Keola and Tanta and a few children.

Keola and Tanta took their seat in the sand out of earshot of the boat crew, whilst the children played about them.

The sun was still low and the breeze that had freshened was pleasant, tepid and filled with sea-scents; a frigate-bird had passed, followed by its swift-moving shadow and from the reefs came the clang of the gulls.

"That is a new man," said Keola.

"Yes," said Tanta.

"Vion is dead," said Tanta, "I heard Poni (the bow oar of the shore boat) telling Taipi. This is the man in his place."

"He is tall," said Keola.

"And different from Vion," said the other. That was all. They did not say another word about Travers.

They played with the children.

Little Tinan, the child of Susini, had been given a toy cart the year before by Vilejon, who, despite his bear-like body and face marked by the whisky bottle, had a love of children and who had children of his own. The cart had been broken long ago and its place supplied by a flat tin can, pulled along by a string.

Keola filled the can with sand for Tinan to pull along to Tanta, who unloaded it and sent it back to Keola to be re-filled, an artless game followed by others in which the rest of the children joined till Travers, leaving the trader's house, came along back to the boat. He paused at the group of girls and children and stood for a moment, cigar in mouth, watching the game in progress, and saying a few words, then he went on to the boat and was rowed off, and the children wanted to continue the game, but the girls had lost interest in it.

They rose and stood for a moment, their faces to the sea, then they came back towards the village, Tanta cheery and chattering, Keola saying nothing.

For the man with eyes like the sea had spoken to Tanta.

He had never once glanced at Keola.

CHAPTER IV

FERGUSSON, the mate, took charge of the loading of the copra, and Travers had his hands free for a while. He came and stopped at Sampson's.

Leisure in the Warm Lands holds out a fatal temptation to the white man—the whisky bottle—but Travers was drink proof. He took alcohol only

in moderation. He was moderate in all things, and never swore; a blessed saint, said Sampson—well, maybe.

He had a Kodak, saint Travers, and in his cabin on board the *Northern Star* he had several albums full of snaps, a sort of picture diary of the last ten years, western ocean pictures and China Sea pictures, beaches at Yezo, the bund at Nagasaki, Bow Bazaar, evening on the Hoogli, Macao, Aden, all taken when he was a steamboat man, then came the stick and string period, all Pacific. He had changed from steam to sail in some mysterious way, changed maybe, his name too, after the fashion of men when they become saints. However that might be, the pictures were excellent and marked by one outstanding feature common to all—the number of girls they portrayed. Girls and beautiful scenery evidently appealed most to his photographic soul, and the first snapshot he took on the beach at Vatava was a group of four girls, including Keola and Tanta, the second a picture of Tanta, posed alone.

Then, if you had been there and given to photography, you might have secured many a picture of him and Tanta on the beach, on the long reef to which you can clamber when the tide is low—and one most beautiful picture of Tanta raising her lips to his in the glade near where the few last sandal trees grow, a great butterfly hovering above them and the song of the torrent filling the air.

The song would not have been registered by the camera, but it was there in the photograph taken by the brain of Keola.

For she had followed them, silent as the moving leaf shadows, and had seen all.

Leaving aside the natural history fact that this creature was as attractive to women as a yucca plant to moths, the main reason why Keola had come to love him was, perhaps, that he had never cast more than a glance at her.

That he had chosen Tanta, her life companion and chief friend, made the affair worse. Her love for Tanta did not turn to hate, it died and went like a dead wasp into the brandy of her passion for Travers.

Now wasp brandy drives men crazy, and for a while that day Keola was crazy enough in all truth, crazy enough to have killed the object of her adoration, had she possessed the killing instinct of the Melanesian.

But she was a Polynesian with a white streak in her.

Pure-blooded, she might have gone home and turned her face to the wall and just died; the white streak saved her from that.

She took a canoe and, with one of Poni's boys, went out beyond the reefs, riding the vast swell with its hills that lifted them to the sky and its valleys that all but hid Vatava. He was there, and in the green below where the globed jelly-fish rolled like crystal spheres, and the fish sharks showed like shadows—he was there.

"What are you looking for?" asked Poni's boy, and Keola laughed so strangely that he struck the water with his paddle and turned the canoe's head to the shore.

Keola did not mind. The sea was no use to her, wherever she went she would find him and, sure enough, on the beach when she reached it, he was there, in the flesh, walking with Tanta.

CHAPTER V

VATAVA in the old days had done good business with sandal-wood traders, but sandal-wood had died out as a trade, giving place to copra, and the few trees left on Vatava are of little account, and should you wish to reach them, beware! for they grow on the shoulder of Hualiva and between them and the four hundred feet cliff that seems shorn with the single stroke of a sword from a mass of black marble, there lies a smear of moss, treacherous as the moss that grows on Trinidad.

Once you lose footing on that slope you are lost. Keola knew this.

It was getting towards evening and she had climbed from the western beach, taking the copra road for the first half mile of her way and then a forest path that no European foot could have found or held to.

It brought her out on the shoulder of Hualiva and close to the grey-green mossy carpet that stretched like a toboggan slide to the sheer cliff and the sea below.

She could hear the sea spouting and speaking amidst the rocks, lessening and loudening in the wind that was blowing in her face, and seeming to call to her in its sinister and watery voice: "Come, Keola, daughter of Pari, come to me, Keola, for the man you love will cast no eyes on you, he is Tanta's —Tanta's—Tanta's—come to me, Keola, daughter of Pari."

But Keola was not the person to throw herself four hundred feet to death, violence was not her way, and she had climbed up all this distance, not

to hear what the sea had to say in the way of enticement, but to consult Jibberick.

Jibberick had been a great man once. Once upon a time Jibberick had been able to bring rain, to heal the sick, to make the wind come fair and hold it fair whilst the canoes made Anaho, that spot on the eastern horizon. But he couldn't do these things now.

First of all, he was old, very old, maybe a hundred or more: secondly, the virtue had gone out of him somehow with the coming of civiiization. Men didn't believe in him as they used to, and you can't fancy how that spoils miracle-working.

In the old days believers would wait a week, even a fortnight, for the fair wind he had sent for, and if one of his patients died instead of getting well the friends and relations would take the matter philosophically, knowing that it is not every egg in a clutch that will bear a chicken, but nowadays even if a fair wind had come at his beckoning, I doubt if the fact would have been put down to his credit and not to the "weather."

Men did not believe in him as a miracle-worker for good any more, yet, and this is a strange fact, they were not nearly so incredulous as to his powers for evil.

Jibberick was, in fact, no longer consulted for health's sake. If you had an enemy you wanted an injury done to, that was a different matter, or if you were in love and the affair wasn't going successfully—if, in fact, evil spirits had either to be employed or propitiated.

Keola kept along the tree edge clear of the moss till she came to a bay in the trees where the wise one had built his house. It was not more than five feet

n height, it was thatched with palmetto leaves nd in front of it was seated the ambassador of his Satanic majesty in Vatava, pounding some stuff n a bowl.

The terrible thing about Jibberick was the fact hat you could see his skull, less from emaciation han the fact that the years had shrunk his flesh in uch a way that the skull was made manifest as a eality.

He showed no surprise at the invasion of his rivacy. He nodded over the bowl at his visitor nd was the first to speak.

"It is Keola, the daughter of Pari," said this compound of Bunkum and terrible potentialities. 'I heard your footsteps leave the beach. You came by the road of the copra-gatherers."

That there was no other road did not occur to Keola, who bowed her pretty head in assent and in homage to the sorcerer.

"You came to see Jibberick, who dwells amidst the ghosts of the Ancient—led by the string that is tied to the heart," went on Jibberick, pounding away at the stuff in the bowl, which was kava.

He dropped the subject and went on with his pounding. You could hear the tink-tink of an echo to it amidst the trees and the speaking and spouting of the sea far down below.

Keola stood with her head still bent.

"What money have you?" suddenly asked the other, knowing full well the one and only quest that would bring a girl from the far beach up to him through the woods braving evil spirits and all such things.

"My hands are empty," said Keola. "What would you?"

Now, Jibberick, though he seemed to live alone, knew all things and all the affairs of men, that is to say, all things that transpired in the little village by Half Moon Bay, and all the petty affairs of its inhabitants. It was his business and he was a keen business man. Saoni, the old woman who served Sampson, was one of his wives, but he had several others. He knew that Sampson drank much whisky and that his whisky was good, he had a little of it in his hut, that the *Northern Star* had brought a consignment of canned salmon, that Poni, the basket-maker, beat his wife, that his wife was carrying on with Tolea, that Pari had saved many dollars, and where he kept his bank, etc.

"Five dollars," said Jibberick.

"You shall have them," said Keola, and this magician could read all that passed in the girl's mind and what she intended to do. He could see her in imagination, going to the chest in Pari's hut, raising from it the fish traps and nets that always covered it, taking the five dollars from Pari's store and bringing it to him.

"To-morrow," finished Keola.

Jibberick dipped his skull in assent. He knew she would do what she promised. Then the consultation began.

A spell to make a man forget the girl he loved and turn his face to Keola. That was all she wanted, in her innocence.

A spell to make Travers forget a girl—ye Gods!

Jibberick consulted within himself for a while, then, going to his house, he brought forth a marvellous pictured box with the magic words, "McVitie and Price" upon it. The box was made of tin and, opening it, he considered the contents.

There were many things in this box, some innocent, some deadly. Extracts of oap, dried and powdered, arsenic, quinine, with leaves and roots of various plants to represent the old order of medicine as it existed in Vatava before the captain of the *Haliotis* lost his drug chest when the ship stranded and was "salved" by the islanders.

Jibberick had experimented with many of the new drugs on fowls and even on people—some of them did the most surprising things, others did nothing. He used the ones that did nothing, as a rule, for charms, especially love charms.

These girls who came to him for love charms were not only his main stand-by, but the bane of his life; for he knew that Love was too powerful a god to be influenced by Gregory's powder or bicarbonate of soda, he just had to trust to chance. Whereas he could always be certain of his means and the result were a charm required to put a dog permanently to sleep or to induce an illness in friend or foe. He could produce the quaintest illnesses, could Jibberick, he could make a man twitch and jump and get stiff as a board, almost; he could make a man very sick, or give him dreadful pains in the stomach, and thirst, after which spots would come out on him.

However, Keola only wanted a love charm. He gave it to her. A white powder wrapped in a bit of paper. It was to be put in the food or drink of the man she wanted. Everything else would be all right.

She went off with it, promising that the five dollars would be his on the morrow. Went off with it back down through the woods, leaving Jibberick to his kava and his supper and his meditations.

Dark came and a royal moon that lit the seas and the woods. The dispenser of drugs, putting away his things before closing for the night, had no need of a lamp to assist him. Putting back the dried rats' tails, the desiccated lizard, the bundles of dried leaves and the little bottles in the magic tin box, he suddenly came to a stop. He discovered like many another dispenser before him, that he had made a mistake.

He had given the girl Keola, daughter of Pari, the wrong charm. The drug store of the sea captain held surprises like that; the men who made these things — and Jibberick was assured in his mind that the squat glass bottles were made of water, magically hardened—why did they make them so alike? This was not the first time that they had tricked him.

The bother was he couldn't remember ever having used the stuff he had given Keola before.

"I am getting old," said Jibberick to himself.

Should he follow Keola down to the beach village and get back the charm?

"I am getting old," said Jibberick to himself, "and by this it may be too late; to put my hand to this affair now might be to put it in the mouth of a not dead turtle. When you have sucked your neighbour's eggs swallow the shells so that no man may know what you have done. Trust not the shark that seems gorged or the whip ray that seems dead on the beach. Wake not the dog with sharp teeth when he sleepeth. All maids are liars and who will believe the word of one maid whom no one saw come here or depart. Whereas, were Jibberick to seek her now and be seen in the village, folk might believe her tale. Let me seek sleep instead who

tells nothing, sees nothing, hears nothing, and who makes all days silent, and without pictures, and of no more use."

Then he turned in.

* * * * *

Arrived home, Keola found her father, Pari, at the night fishing on the reefs.

She went to the chest where the money was stored, found the key, that was concealed in a cunning hole beneath the flooring and opened the chest.

She took six dollars, five for Jibberick and one for Saoni, from the store, closed the chest, locked it, hid the key and then sat down on the mats to recover herself.

She had made a terribly long journey away from honesty, everything seemed different, even the picture of King Edward the Seventh, cut from an *Illustrated London News*, and adorning the wall. She dreaded the return of her father; the beetle working in the beam of the roof seemed telling her uneasy things.

Then she came to herself and left the house, for the purpose driving her was not to be denied.

Saoni, the servant of Sampson, lived alone in a hut close to her master's house. She was asleep, but at the call of Keola she rose and came out, and the pair, squatting in the moonlight close by the hut wall, held consultation.

They were old friends and Saoni, the matter being explained, was willing to help. She would put the charm in Travers's food or drink, all that would be easy. The dollar, oh, she did not want payment, still, well, if Keola insisted—she took it, crawled back to her bed and Keola went home.

CHAPTER VI

Two days later, walking on a lonely strip of beach, Keola met Travers, and as they passed each other she looked into his eyes. He had never noticed her before, his attention had been taken up altogether by Tanta.

Two girls on one string were nothing to this gentleman, who was a juggler in his way in matters like that. He turned and walked with Keola.

That was the beginning of ten days' bliss. He was such a tender-hearted man and he managed things so well that Tanta never knew.

He told Keola the truth that Tanta was no more to him now than the gulls that flew on the beach, but that he did not wish to hurt her, he could still pretend to love her, but his real love was for Keola. And she consented to meet him in secret and to keep up the deception. As a matter of fact these clandestine meetings were to her more delightful than any open love affair could have been: search in the human heart for the reason—I cannot tell you.

He told her that he would have to go away, but that when he came back—oh, when he came back, they would never be parted. He would marry her and settle down and live at Vatava, and build a house, she would be his own little wifie and they would keep chickens.

He told the same to Tanta.

On the day he sailed, never to come back, for he had already entered into an engagement to change sail for steam, and go first officer on a Manesman ship, his two future wives watched

his departure from separate and hidden points of vantage.

They saw the *Northern Star* clear the reefs and take the wind, a swan of the sea with white wings spread. They watched her till she was hull down, till the star of her topsails (she was a topsail-schooner) vanished from sight. Then they went into the woods to weep their hearts out.

CHAPTER VII

AND is that the end of the story? Oh dear no. The end of the story lies with Saoni and her peculiar nature, also with Providence.

Saoni, like most Polynesians, was of a facile disposition. I once heard of a Polynesian servant who was told to black a man's boots. He forgot, and the man had to go out with unblacked boots; the servant discovering his own forgetfulness and to make up for it, blacked a pair of the man's yellow tan shoes.

Saoni was like that, all heart, but wanting sometimes in other ways.

She had put the charm to be given to Travers on the kitchen shelf with the silver dollar on top of it and an inverted mug over the lot.

She intended to put the charm into his food or drink, but found it a very difficult thing to do. To put it into a dish used for general consumption was no use. Travers generally drank weak whisky and water at his meals, there was no use in putting it in the whisky bottle that was also used by Sampson, or in the water jug. Then she forgot all about it, till just as the *Northern Star* was going to sail, Sampson

called on her to produce his two last precious bottles of beer.

Then came recollection, regret for a forgotten duty paid for, and inspiration.

She did not seem to envisage the fact that as a love charm, the thing was too late.

Black the tan shoes, anyhow.

She popped the poison, slow in its effects as sure, into one of the beer bottles, shook it, brought the bottles into the sitting-room and poured Travers out his draught.

"And here's chin-chin," said Travers.

Then he departed for his ship to sail away and forget the girls he left behind him.

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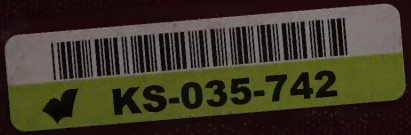
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